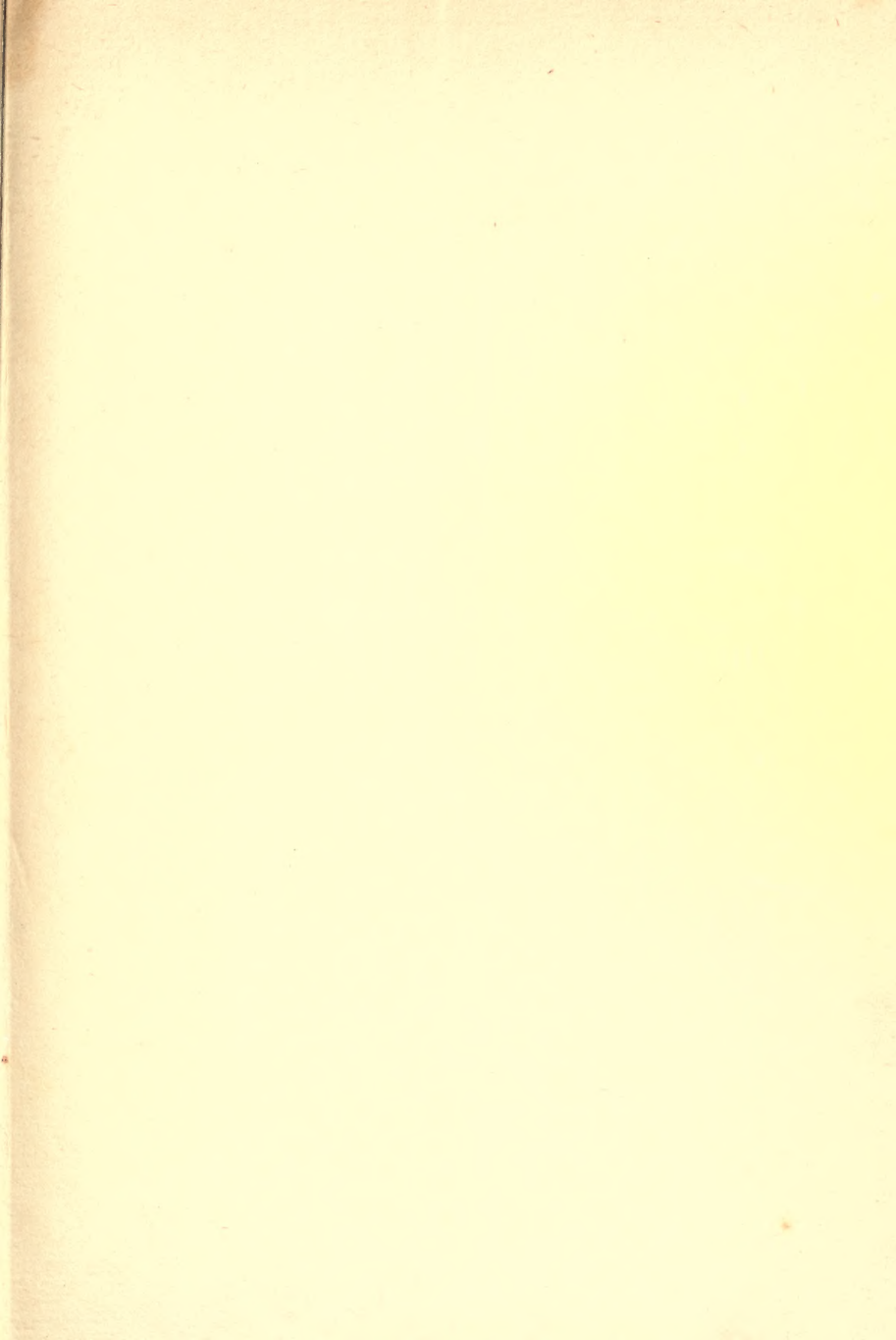




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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN  
EXPERIENCE

## GOD'S CIRCLE

GOD flashed His pow'r into the void,  
And thus His bidding ran—  
“Be thou through curve on curve employed  
Of great'ning Life, till man,  
Last-born, with clear will unalloyed,  
Turn Life where Life began.”

In clear-drawn round the line was steered  
Till man's pow'r seized its sway:  
Through will unrul'd and spirit seared  
Was checked the circling play;  
And Life fulfilled no perfect-sphered,  
God-born, God-ended, way.

God's pow'r flashed forth once more, and lo!  
Whence Life had first begun  
Life o'er the gap itself did throw  
To Life whose sweep was done:  
God the cleft circle rounded so—  
Man God-grasped by God's Son.

# The Philosophy of Christian Experience

BY  
HENRY W. CLARK

AUTHOR OF  
"MEANINGS AND METHODS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE"  
"THE CHRIST FROM WITHOUT AND WITHIN"  
ETC., ETC.

With an Appreciation by  
MARCUS DODS, D.D.



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# AN APPRECIATION

By MARCUS DODS, D.D.

Not twice in a generation does one meet with so valuable an analysis of experimental religion as Mr. Henry Clark gives us in his "Philosophy of Christian Experience." Of Mr. Clark we know nothing more than what is told us by the title-page and the book itself. Indeed, we took up his book with the fear that we were asked to read still another faddist's special distortion of the facts of Christian experience, or his cranky explanation of them. What we actually find is a very thorough, profound and living treatment of the hackneyed themes of "Conversion," "God's Fatherhood," "Repentance," and the other essentials of religious experience. His account of human nature as it is, of man's need of religion, and of Christ as the life-giver, are as fresh as if no one had ever written of religion before. But above all else is his treatment of the Fatherhood of God impressive and remarkable. Much as has in recent years been written upon this subject, we can point to nothing which more decisively penetrates to the heart of the matter. Those who seek some freshening of their religious life, some help that touches not the mere outworks but its real seat and essence, would do well to consult "The Philosophy of Christian Experience" by Henry W. Clark.—*British Weekly*.



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# THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

## I

### INTRODUCTORY : THE METHOD OF STUDY

**I**T may be of service to readers of this book to say a prefatory word or two as to the book's method and as to the lines on which it runs. By the saying of a few such preliminary words the reader's attitude and expectation may perhaps be so regulated that disappointment shall not ensue : at any rate, the object of the following chapters—whether or no it be attained—can thus from the beginning be made clear.

I

An examination of religion may be conducted in either of two distinct ways. Religion may be viewed either as a science or as an art. As a matter of fact, religion is both ; but for purposes of investigation, and while the investigation proceeds, it is necessary to consider it in one of the two aspects alone, and to rule out the other. The distinction between the two methods of investigation needs to be kept in mind, and a clear decision as to the adopted method needs to be taken and adhered to, if any religious investigation is to yield definite profit to mind or heart.

A science is a body of related facts and laws which exist antecedently to, and independently of, the mind of man. Scientific inquiry is not a matter of making or producing anything, but of discovering what is already there ; and we are successful in it, not when we *put anything forth from ourselves* (except, of course, the mental effort and the

## INTRODUCTORY : THE METHOD OF STUDY

patient experiment that are required), but when we *gather in*, and lodge within the storehouse of the mind, the knowledge of that which lies beyond us, in whose production we had no part. To make progress in science is a harvesting, not a sowing ; it is an exploration, not an invention : the question here is not one of manufacture, but of measuring and photographing and classifying what other powers than our own have made. The geologist discovers the secrets of the earth ; but he does not create or change them. The astronomer makes himself at home amid planets and suns and stars ; but he does not construct them nor order their courses. The long history written in the crusts of earth by the finger of time would be the same though no one read or translated it : the shining constellations owe nothing of their reality to the eye that probes them. The scientist stretches out his hand and picks up, as it were, the fact and law which lie outside himself. The mission of science is to investigate rather than to make. Science is not creative, but inquisitive : its call is not to be original,

but to discover the things that have been hidden from the foundation of the world ; and it does not, so to say, write its own book out of its own head, but is rather the amanuensis, setting down what the eternal and established order of things dictates.

An art, on the other hand, is concerned with making, origination, production : the processes of art are essentially creative : the object art keeps in view is the projection into the sum of things of that which did not previously exist : the painter or the sculptor verily calls the picture or the statue into being, and as it were confers objective actuality upon a thought. Something has been, not discovered, but *made*, when poet or sculptor has accomplished his work. The musician *creates* the oratorio, if he be one of the masters who weave into new combinations and new forms the elements of sound : if he be of those whose function it is to interpret the music with which others have enriched the world, his work is creative none the less truly, even though the "palace of music" he rears dissolve again as soon as built. While science



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picks up the facts which have from the beginning lain embedded in the substance of the universe, art passes along earth's ways flinging new facts, new realities, on every hand as it goes. It has less concern with that which was born long ago than with the new births which all its efforts are set to bring about. Every art has, of course, a science behind it : the painter is governed by, and needs to know, the everlasting facts and principles of colour and form and proportion and the rest : the musician must accept, and humble himself to, the changeless laws of sound which he did not make and which he cannot abolish ; but this is after all only to say that the artist of every order must use the material which belongs to his particular sphere. Limited as in this sense the artist's creative power may be, the essence of the artist's vocation lies in that power's exercise ; and once again it may be said that while science discovers, art creates.

## II

It has been said that religion is both a science and an art ; also that an investigation of religion must determine at the outset in what light religion is to be viewed. Religion, on its scientific side, is the special care of theology, strictly so called : there is—so religion holds—a whole range of spiritual worlds and spiritual realities and spiritual personalities which have existed from the beginning until now ; and it is the business of theological science to ascertain whatever can be ascertained concerning their nature, their mutual relations, their intentions, their works ; or, if we are to speak in more definite terms, to the science of religion belong such doctrines as those of the Godhead, of creation and its method, of atonement in its influence upon the disposition of God toward men, and of the person of Christ. The list is of course in no wise exhaustive, but for the purposes of illustration it may serve. Now a moment's reflection suffices to show that whatever the

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truth upon any of these subjects may be—whatever may be the ultimate reality which any one of these doctrines attempts to express—that truth and that reality exist outside of man, would stand unaltered and would, so to say, keep their point, although to-morrow the human race should disappear. On this side of it religion is a thing to be *investigated* only, not a thing to be *experienced* or a thing to be *done*. Its material lies separate and apart. It is admitted that some practical consequences for life and conduct ought to follow from every discovery in these doctrinal fields ; but this is only to say that a doctrine, once established, becomes the *logical* antecedent of a certain practical change ; and that the sequence is only a logical, not a more intimate one, is proved by the fact that a doctrine may be “discovered” and known, and yet the logically necessary practical results be looked for in vain. What investigation of religion in this direction results in is simply a *fact, or series of facts, which lie outside of man* : from this point of view religion is a science

which gathers up the truths as to what has been and what is in the spiritual realm.

But there is another range of themes with which religion is concerned—themes which are at least as important in themselves as those forming the material of theology properly so described, and themes which really touch us much more closely than theological problems are able to do. Religion speaks of and inculcates some definite processes of moral and spiritual culture: it draws up a programme to which the energies of heart and will must adhere: it prescribes a certain *doing* and a certain *becoming* for the inner nature of us; and from this point of view religion may be called *the art of character-production*. It provides a *method* now—not merely a body of truth. The greatest words of religion, such as conversion, repentance, faith, holiness, and salvation, refer to something which man himself, using or adjusting the faculties of his inmost personality, is to do or to have done upon him. All these terms indicate, not mysteries which human intellects may probe,



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but movements which human nature is to make : they point to a definite manufacture—if the word may pass—by man, or at any rate within man, of something new. Man, when he is under charge of these ideas, is not like the explorer seeking the treasure hid in a field : he is rather like the sculptor chiselling out his ideal. When religion speaks of such things to man's listening ear, it looks upon man, one might say, as upon the artist who is to be guided to the origination of a self, a personality, which did not previously exist. And an investigation of religion on this side must proceed to the determination of questions like these—What is the final product which religion requires man to make, or to have made, out of himself ? What are the processes, the adjustments of faculty, the discipline of all elements contained in personality, through which that final product is to be achieved ? If each man's nature at the start of things corresponds to the colours lying upon the palette, what is the finished picture to be ? To examine religion as a science is to learn the eternal facts of the

spiritual world as they lie outside of man : to examine religion as an art is to learn the secret of creating something new within man. There are certain things which we have to do with ourselves and upon ourselves : what are they ? It is to this inquiry that religion, when it speaks of conversion or of faith, is giving its reply. Religion, in its employment of language such as this, is laying down the lines along which the art of the inner life is to be practised and pursued.

One may, if one so chooses, state the distinction between the two aspects of religion differently, and say that religion has both a theoretical and a practical side. But if the two compartments of religious truth be thus labelled, care must be taken that to each one is allotted its true content. It is customary to speak of the theory and the practice—or of the doctrine and the practice—of religion ; but frequently such topics as those which have been above declared to belong to the “art” side of religion are set in the theoretical class ; and by the practical matters are meant,

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roughly speaking, the "good works" which external conduct, under the pressure of religion, is bound to show. For our purpose the line between the theoretical and the practical must be drawn at a different level. Religion, even when its immediate topic is the condition of the human soul and what goes on within it, is still as essentially practical as when it is enunciating the virtues of charity, temperance, and truth; for in its dealing with the affairs of the soul it is still laying down a programme which the soul must actively go through. In other words, there is a practice of the soul as well as a practice of the lip and hand. The soul makes itself, though it make nothing else. Activity goes forth from it, though it come home to its starting-point again. Conversion, repentance, faith are all practical affairs, for they are parts of the art of character-making, as religion essays to teach it: these words stand for definite processes, even though it be within the limits of a single personality, and not upon a stage which all the world can see, that the processes are worked out: they show the lines over

which the self in each man has to take its journey; and if religion be divided into matters theoretical and matters practical, the experiences to which these words and all their closely related words refer must be counted on the practical side.

It is with religion as an art that we, in our subsequent study, shall be concerned. The aim set before us is to discover what man's inner nature is to do or to have done upon it, and how the doing may be achieved. We are to get at some conception of the processes through which personality is to pass, if the method of life religion emphasises is recognised as having authority to command. What has religion to say about the origination of a new self?—that is our question. Perhaps one may be permitted to express the opinion that the revived modern interest in religious investigation has devoted itself somewhat too exclusively to the scientific aspects of religious truth, and that, while theological reconstructions have often been attempted, a re-statement of religion on its practical side (as

defined above) is yet awaited. And since it is the ultimate aim and the highest interest of all of us to come at last to the stature of a perfect man—in other words, to carry the art of character-making through to a triumphant issue—it cannot be a useless thing to attempt such a re-statement, and to ascertain afresh what is the programme which, for those who keep that end in view, religion lays down.

### III

The primary purpose of this book, therefore, is not apologetic, but explanatory ; yet perhaps the hope may be entertained that from the fulfilment of its explanatory purpose something of apologetic value may result. These pages are intended to assist towards a clearer comprehension of the content, the connotation, of certain fundamental religious ideas. Their aim is to afford a glimpse upon the inner side of certain religious phrases which, for the ordinary man, are but little

more than pieces of religious nomenclature—labels attached to, but at the same time hiding, some realities of spiritual experience. And in so far as this is accomplished, the religious ideas and the religious phrases thus dealt with must surely come to their vindication for the mind, or at least cover much of the approach thereto. To touch and handle anew the treasures of meaning which the standard expressions of religion contain, is the best method of proving that the standard religious expressions are in place in any reasonable account of the world and of man. Religious ideas, when rightly grasped, are found to come so near to the essential facts and necessities of human character and human life—to fill up so harmoniously the chords whereof human nature has, so to say, already found the outside notes—that he who rightly grasps religious ideas needs scarce any other vindication of their truth than that which his own grasp has brought. It is in this faith—in the faith that together with a better understanding of religious ideas comes a firmer conviction of their reason-

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ableness — in the faith that to see the *inside* of religious ideas, if it may be so put, is to find them established as well as illuminated — that the following pages are penned.





## II

### THE NEED OF RELIGION

THEY who give themselves to a study of religion, to an examination of its leading ideas and their content, to an investigation of its precise relation to the development of human nature and the conduct of human life, find themselves confronted at the outset by a preliminary question as to the title of religion to the serious consideration for which it asks. Religion declares itself to be the supreme ruler of men: it does not merely offer advice, but it proclaims commands; and it asserts that to neglect it means inevitable loss. It uses great words. It dispenses—at any rate, it professes to dispense—rewards and penalties in regnant manner: it unhesitatingly assumes infallibility for its every

promise and its every warning word. Here is no timidly made suggestion, held forth as a possible guide to life's activities and a plausible solution of the mysteries under whose shadow life may lie—here is, rather, a voice which claims to say the authoritative and final word. "Without me ye can do nothing" is the utterance for ever upon its lips.

Is there anything in human experience that calls for such definiteness of instruction and for such authoritative interference as this? Do we require—and can we without detriment to our manhood receive—an influence which takes so commanding a tone? The inquiry calls for settlement: it is an inquiry which, whether articulately or otherwise, moves, probably, through many minds; and much of the current indefiniteness of religious apprehension, much of the prevalent feebleness of the relation between religion and the souls of men, may be said to result from a vague feeling that religion makes somewhat of an intrusion upon human life. Men and women are not entirely free from a suspicion

## THE NEED OF RELIGION

that in dealing with religious affairs they are turning away, as it were, from the main line of things and acknowledging the legitimacy of a claim which is pressed too far. The very loudness of the voice with which religion speaks compels attention—but does it not speak somewhat *too* loudly? Is it in truth as indispensable as it professes to be? Might not human nature, following out the lines of development which stretch ahead, working out its possibilities with diligence and care, come at last to its goal without such an addition to its interests and its duties as is implied in acceptance of the great religious ideas? And it is a needful thing, before seeking for the significance of those religious ideas, and for the true inwardness of the religious exercises to which we are called, to vindicate—if so it may be—the justice of the religious claim, and to show that religion is, as it declares itself to be, an absolute necessity, if humanity is to fulfil its destiny and to stand forth at last full grown.

I *consciousness of failure*

It is a matter of common acknowledgment that somehow or other human life has missed its way; and although differences of opinion may begin to manifest themselves so soon as we seek to pass beyond that elementary statement, yet on the bare fact which that elementary statement alleges, practically all are agreed. That there is something abnormal about human experience as we know it—that the present condition and status of man are not precisely what would have been reached had not interferences with man's normal progress somewhere come in—that at some point the brake has been applied to human nature's advance—no survey of human character and of the human position, as these are exemplified either in others or in ourselves, can fail to show to any truly observant eye. It may be the case that only now and then do most men and women pass into the mood and atmosphere in which the conviction of life's imperfection and arrest presses hard:

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it may even be the case that some few make their journey from cradle to grave without finding themselves face to face with that conviction at all; and yet scarcely any voice will be raised in controversy if it be declared that the conviction, when it comes, is just. Though it be, in our experience, infrequent as to time, we confess it to be the messenger who reveals to us things as they are. It brings an exceptional, but none the less an accurate, realisation of our common state. And all dealing with human life, all suggestion for its future, all systematising of its programmes, has to start from the admitted fact that somehow human life has failed.

What and where has the failure been? Every man, reading things in the light of his own instincts, holds it to be his supreme business to make the most of himself. The necessity of self-development is the natural starting-point for all human activity; and although—under a remembrance of the evils to which self-development, taken as the governing idea of life and action, sometimes

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leads—we may qualify the matter by the introduction of other ideas, or even go so far as professedly to substitute the idea of brotherhood for the idea of self-development, still in the normal conception of things life's meaning and purpose is held to lie in the full development of what we are. The individual that I am—or the individual that is latent in me—is my dominating concern. We are conscious that the supreme matter with us is to grow to as great a height as may be, to find perfect liberty and scope for all that our own personality contains. All other things are, or ought to be, we instinctively conclude, subordinate to the working out and fulfilment of our own particular individual life. To be full-grown, to come into possession of a finished and rounded nature, to have this self of ours brought out as into a large place where it shall be strong and free—this we take to be the commanding aim. The questions which every man hears beating through his consciousness, when he sets himself beneath the pre-ordained nature of things and asks it to interpret its design for him, are these: "How

unity of individual natures.



am *I* to reach perfect stature? How am *I* to find my place and fill it? How am *I* to complete all these things that are begun in me, to train and enrich and colour this self of mine so that it shall really have some worth?" The supreme business each man feels himself called upon pre-eminently to take in hand is the business of making the most of himself.

That is not—or at any rate need not be—selfishness; and it may be said at once that with this primary instinct religion has no quarrel. Indeed, religion can only confirm the pronouncement which this instinct makes: on the religious and theistic view of the human lot, it must be God's first desire for every human creature into whom He has breathed the breath of life that the self shall grow. Of course there is room and call, in a right view of life and duty, for the words self-sacrifice, self-suppression, self-restraint; but these words may be employed in such wise as to mislead, or in such wise as to disturb, the true proportion and balance of things; and religion only answers "yea"

to that fundamental impulse which forces into the forefront the business of making the most of ourselves. Not of part of ourselves—to make the most of only part of ourselves is what, according to the declarations of religion, leads to lives deformed and narrow. To make the most of *all* ourselves (always bearing in mind that mis-directed will has introduced among the contents of our natures certain qualities—the negatives of the true, one might perhaps call them—which, strange as they were when first they came, have now made themselves so much at home that they have forgotten their former strangeness)—but to make the most of *all* ourselves, of the whole character, is what produces or would produce, lives rich and fair. To make the most of self may legitimately be taken as the all-inclusive programme. Make the most of self, and we shall be unselfish, for the love-instinct is there among the self's endowments, waiting to be worked out and fulfilled : make the most of self, and not a single obligation, once recognised, will be ignored, for the instinct of right is there among the self's

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endowments, waiting to ascend its throne. And so, with every possibility worked out, with every half-created power brought to maturity, life would reach its ideal and answer to its call. Our supreme business is to make the most of ourselves.

Yet equally clamant with the consciousness that this is what we ought to do is the other consciousness that this is precisely what we have not done ; and it is here, we know, that the failure of life's present order lies. We make so little of ourselves, after all. These natures of ours are somehow prisoned, whoever or whatever may be the enemy that has locked them in : they are almost dying for space and light and air, and yet cannot go out into the large ranges of life which they know are there. It is only by metaphor that our experience of limitation can be described, but every one who has taken a look beneath the superficial aspects of his living will admit that the metaphor truly tells his tale. Human development—in the individual first, and consequently in the race — is stunted : the self within us is kept out of its heritage : whether

the obstacle be within us or without, something there most assuredly is that checks us; and whatever we may be, we know that round about us is a life of scope, of liberty, of fulfilment, to which we have not penetrated yet. Our natures know not how to master circumstances,—they know not, and therein lies a worse ignorance, how to master themselves. It is an impossible thing for us to live on a great scale. We feel ourselves to be an unkept promise, a building begun and then left unroofed, a mere suggestion not carried out. We are like men immured in some stifling cell in spite of all their passionate longing for mountain-air and all their loud appeal for wider room. If it be our primary aspiration to make the most of ourselves, it is the primary fact of our actual experience that we are able to make scarcely anything of ourselves after all.

II *Philosophy: Life a relat*

If now we attempt to pierce somewhat more deeply into the meaning of our consciousness of failure, to analyse it until its central and essential point is reached, we are driven to the conclusion that the explanation of our imperfect self-development lies in the imperfect relation existing between what is within us and what is without. We are incomplete in our manhood because our manhood has not found something wherewith to relate itself—whatever that something, when found, might prove to be—or, if it has found that something, has not rightly adjusted the relation nor made and kept it true. Human nature, with all the factors entering into the make of it, needs for its perfecting to yield response to, and to receive response from, something beyond itself; and it is in so far as that response is not given or obtained that human nature fails. That much at least may be said by any one who dispassionately reads off the facts of his own experience: that reli-

gious implications already begin to look forth from the statement throws no suspicion upon the statement itself; and if it be objected that in making it we are merely adopting an assumption in order to support a religious theory previously held, we may say in reply that any consideration of the essential significance of life leads us on to lines of thought entirely consistent with what has just been said. "Harmony with environment" may not be a definition of life, but, if not a definition, it is at any rate a description true so far as it goes; and that the essence of life lies in *relation* is a fact not to be denied.

For life certainly does not altogether consist in anything that we find within ourselves. To be self-absorbed is to die: were there no world outside of us touching us, appealing to us, mixing itself with us, we could not live, in the full sense of the word: we can imagine ourselves living without this *present* world round about us, but we cannot imagine ourselves living without having round about us any world at all; and if we were unable to



## THE NEED OF RELIGION

look beyond the limits of our own personality, if we were conscious only of ourselves and of nothing and nobody else, we might continue a sort of dreamy existence, but *life* would be wholly unknown. Little as we usually think about such matters, the thing is plain enough once the attention is roused; and with a moment's consideration the fact flashes out into clearness, that our life is half made by, depends in large measure upon, what is outside ourselves. The materials whereof life is constructed are not all to be picked up within the bounds of our own natures. There must be something coming upon us, touching us, from beyond, as well as something moving within, if we are in truth to live.

On the other hand, life does not consist in simply being touched and worked upon by a world outside us. If life is not made altogether out of what is within us, neither is it made altogether out of what is beyond. If it were, then slavery would be the truest life; and he who lies passive under whatever is imposed upon him, who kills all the capa-



cities and instincts of his nature and lets them have no say in the ordering of his days—he would best know by experience what life may be. We should not live if we depended entirely upon ourselves; but neither should we live if we depended entirely upon others. To have experience after experience flung upon us, as it were—we having nothing to do in the making or in the control or in the using of it—would be, not life, but death. An existence given to us ready made, finished down to its smallest detail—an existence which required nothing of us except to let it come and go—to such an existence as that the name of life could not be given.

What makes life, then? It is made by a right *relation*—it is made neither by what is beyond us nor by what is within us: it is made by the response of what is beyond us to what is within us, or by the response of what is within us to what is beyond us—by the harmony between the two. When a capacity forms itself in us, and out of the boundless deep of possible experiences there

draws toward us an experience which meets the capacity and fills it, we live. When some instinct, some power, comes to birth in our natures, and somewhere, in the world over which our sight (whether of eye or mind) can range and which our reach can compass, we come upon the scope for the instinct, the power, to work itself out, we live. And the more the capacities and the instincts waken within—so long as they are met by the response they call for—so much the greater does life become: the more points of harmonious contact we can establish between what is within and what is without, so much the more does life grow rich. When from beyond ourselves there is provided an answer to what stirs within ourselves, life is truly made.

It is through the absence of this perfect correspondence that human life is left a half-developed thing: there exists only a partial and unsatisfactory relation between what is within us and what is without. We seem almost to have got into the wrong world. So much of what we are appears to be wholly out of place, and, as it seeks to declare itself

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and to satisfy itself, meets with no response ; and thus, from that lack of harmony between the world within us and the world without us, the sense of narrowness and poverty in our life descends. Circumstance is ever saying " No " to the appeals of our nature, till under the persistent refusals we begin to wonder whether it be our nature's appeal that is mistaken, or whether it be from somewhere else, if we could but present the appeal there, that the answer to our nature's appeal must come. True life would be ours if all these strivings and beginnings of power in us did not, so soon as they attempt to come forth, strike upon some dead wall against which they shatter themselves and die—if they could only pass on and find a world prepared for them, with space for them to do their work, with reward for them when their work is done. True life would be ours if we did not always seem to be holding out a hand which moves only as in vacancy, with no hand seizing upon it to help it find its prize—if only the out-reaching of our hand found the responsive clasp at once, and we knew that *this* is the

answering clasp for which our hand was seeking. True life would be ours if we did not begin so many things and then feel an iron grasp tighten upon our working and bring it to utter confusion ; if every movement out of our natures found some movement toward our natures issuing forth from beyond to meet it ; if we fitted better into the eternal order of things, and there were not this constant contradiction between what we bring to the world and what the world brings to us. For this makes life's passion of disappointment, and this it is that causes life to be to us so cramped and halting and deformed a thing—this absence of response from outside to the yearnings and strivings and capacities which keep their home within. Did the world without match the world within, perfect life would be attained.

## III

The argument is reinforced, and indeed carried a step further, if we turn upon another line for a moment, and notice that a wider, and a more strictly philosophical, consideration of things leads at last to an analogous idea—brings us, in fact, even nearer to a sight of the necessity of religion than the considerations already adduced. Human life is to be perfected through the relation of human life with something beyond itself—so far, surveying the matter from the standpoint of experience, have we reached. If, adopting the *a priori* method, we inquire for a view of the world as a whole in which the mind may rest, we shall have to confess that the only satisfying conception of things will be one in which man, the final product of the forces which have made the world what it is, is looked upon as related with, bound back into, that out of which all things came. And this is, in effect, to say once more what experience has already said—that human life perfects

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itself, and perfects the world-process whereof it is the crown, by its relation with something beyond itself : this is, indeed, on any theistic view of the universe, to make a more directly religious suggestion than even experience has made.

The most unsatisfactory thing about the dominant evolutionary philosophy (whether it be theistic or otherwise makes for the moment no difference) is that it leaves the whole process hanging, as it were, in mid-air. Even if one could give a detailed account of the manner in which the ultimate Power or Being or Thought—whatever be the chosen term—reveals itself by, or is self-evolved through, the world-process, one would still have an uneasy feeling that something more needs to be said. The mere enunciation of a philosophy of evolution seems to leave us as though with a chain, fastened securely enough at the upper end, but with the lower swinging loose, and having no particular purpose to serve ; and even though we were able to trace each step in the evolving course, up to the last, the real *raison d'être* of the whole thing would be



yet to seek. When we reach the final step of the process, how are we to round off our conception? To what are we to fasten the lower end of the chain?

What we need, in order to a complete and satisfactory view of things, is to perceive some sort of mutual relation between the last term of the evolutionary series and the first—between the Result of evolution and its Source. *This* is what has been evolved; but the Power or Being or Thought behind the evolving cannot have brought all this forth for its own amusement, so to say. What is at the end has not only to come from what was at the beginning: what is at the end must in a manner give back upon what was at the beginning, as well. Not otherwise is there any completeness in the view. We may trace how the First has given birth to the Last, but that does not suffice for our mental rest. We must see how the Last goes back to the First again. In other words, we have not answered all our questions until we look on the whole world-process, not as a straight line (for then, be the line long as it may, it



will always appear to have a note of interrogation at the point of it, and we shall ask, What next ?)—but as a circle, rounded and complete. We save the lower end of our chain from hanging loose by turning it back to the same chain's first link again.

But, as was previously said, this really brings us nearer to a sight of the necessity of religion than does the survey of experience already made. What we want is to perceive some sort of mutual relation between the last term of the evolutionary series and the first—to see the end giving back upon the beginning again. And think and think as we may, we can think of nothing which will answer to that mental necessity of ours except this—the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God, the correspondence of moral nature between man, the product, and God, the Source. For the only reciprocal relations we know exist in the moral sphere : the very name of them is meaningless if it be used of anything expressible in physical terms ; and to say that they must exist between that which stands at the start

of evolution and that which emerges from it, is simply to say that there must be the give and take of two self-conscious and moral natures to make the universe complete. Without this we cannot close up the circle nor hang up the loose end of our chain. Without this we may derive all things *from* whatever is behind the visible process of things, be it blind Force or living Will; but without this we cannot carry back the visible process of things *to* its origin again. Yet to do this is needful to satisfy the instinct of our mental nature. Completeness of view requires that the process curve back to the point whence it came—and it can do this only by the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God. The whole thing grows coherent and rounded when we make the circle finished and entire, when we return the process to its starting-point once more, when we see the course of evolution taking its last steps in the moral development and the ascending moral effort of human life. Thus, “after Last, returns the First, though a wide compass round be fetched,”—and thus, while

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the many processes whereby that which is has come to be are discerned as the descending stages over whose ways the ultimate Power has come down, they are discerned also as in soberest truth, "the world's great altar-stairs, That slope through darkness up to God."

While experience, therefore, is proclaiming that human life is to be perfected by means of its relation with something beyond itself, philosophy is proclaiming the same message in its own sphere and in its own tongue. Philosophy, indeed, imparts a yet more distinctively religious ring to that which it has to say ; for it demands, as the consummation of all things, that "binding back" of the Last to the First in which the essential significance of religion lies. Experience declares that perfect life would be attained if only some world without made fitting answer to the world man carries within. Philosophy declares that all things are perfected by the fitting answer of man to That from which he came,—in other words, by the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God.

And religion, adopting the declarations of both, offers itself as the bringer of the new dynamic through which the required relation may be created or made whole.

If a certain inconsistency be charged against the considerations thus set forth, in that at first life was declared to stand in the response of what is beyond man to what is within, while it is now declared to stand in the response of what is within man to what is beyond, the reply is that the inconsistency is only apparent. Even in dealing with life so far as it is concerned, not with its ultimate spiritual environment, but with the common environments of the common day, the phrases were guarded, and it was said that life is made by the response of what is beyond to what is within, *or* by the response of what is within to what is beyond. Whether, as a matter of fact, the imperfection of life, in its lower sense, is repaired by an adjustment of the individual to the environment or by an adjustment of the environment to the individual, need not be discussed. The essential point is that, between the two, harmony there must

be. It is the *relation* that must be true. When we reach the higher level, however, and deal with the relations between man, the last product of the evolutionary process, and God, the Source, we are entitled to say that it is primarily by the response of what is within man to what is beyond him that life is made complete. For the intention which has run through the process of things can be fulfilled only as man acquiesces in it, identifies himself with it when it seeks to use him for its ends. It is the original idea by which the final relation must be conditioned and ruled. The needed harmony between the Last and the First can only be obtained by the adjustment of the Last to the First. God can only respond to man as man responds to God,—so that the response of man to God covers the case. Life, on its lower ranges, may be completed by the response of what is beyond to what is within : life is completed, when ultimates are in question, by the response of what is within to what is beyond.

## IV

Coming back now to the failure of human life, and to the general sense of that failure by which humanity is possessed, we can assert more definitely wherein the failure consists. Putting together the points already gathered, we can say that life's failure lies in a lack of response, or in an inadequate response, of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God. Or, setting the same fact to another mode of expression, we may declare life's failure to lie in the absence, total or partial, of such a make of character as would fit man into his proper place in the universe, and cause him to carry the circle of things back again to its beginning in God. This is philosophy: this is also religion; and religion, employing (as it has unquestioned right to do) its own nomenclature, and calling that absence of a right character, and the resulting break in the ordained process of things, by the name of sin, offers itself as the remedy for the failure it so names.



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When we speak of religion as insisting on the fact of sin, we need to see to it that our conception of sin is truly framed, and in harmony with the conception of it which religion itself entertains. For much of the objection felt towards the idea of discrediting human nature by an accusation of sinfulness, and towards religion as making the accusation, results from mistaken apprehensions as to what religion, when it brings the charge, really means. When religion declares man to be sinful, it is far from saying that his acts are always evil, or that he is constantly falling into open and obvious wrong. Religion carries in mind the abiding distinction between the things we *do* and the thing we *are*; and it declares simply that while the things we *do* are often right, the thing we *are* is always imperfect—a declaration which, as we have seen, is corroborated, is indeed made beforehand, by the voice of experience in the great majority of men. The distinction, however, is one which objectors to religion, and to the supposed condemnation it passes, leave out of account. The tendency of the modern



conscience is to look upon any decided classification in which right and wrong are the governing ideas as being no longer applicable to life. With life reduced, at any rate apparently, to something like moral order; with rectitude of conduct recognised, on the whole, as necessary for the well-being of society; with moral respectability asked for, generally speaking, from every one, the charge of sinfulness has, according to the modern tendencies of thought, lost its point. There are occasionally, of course, hours in the history of all of us when temptation appears to have gathered its strength for our destruction, and when, for praise or for comfort or for gold, we are half inclined to sell ourselves to that which is definitely and absolutely of the evil one. Then the idea of sin and of its avoidance has relevance once more. But such hours, it is said, are exceptional altogether: some they visit scarcely ever, and for none are they the customary thing: how can it be said of those whose outward experience is placid, who are seldom thrust under the necessity of accepting or rejecting the pressing

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call of extreme wrong—how can it be said that this matter of sin, with which religion occupies itself so largely, is for them such an important concern? In regard to the average man, surely the stress laid upon sinfulness, the constant assertion of its presence, the ceaseless emphasising of it as one of the chief factors in the situation, is overdone! And if the supposed necessity of religion and of religious forces rests upon an allegation which is thus found to be exaggerated or even false, does not the supposed necessity disappear?

But then hold must be kept upon the everlasting distinction between what we *do* and what we *are*. For none of us are the doings and the actions of our days the matter of supreme importance. Behind all the outward activities lies the inward state,—the heart more or less abandoned to righteousness and to the love of righteousness, the character more or less built up of true instincts and worthy affections, the soul and spirit more or less constructed of, transfused by, upward tendencies and God-ward affinities, holy more

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or less in the make and moulding of them. And the statement of religion is that in regard to all these things the word is always *less* rather than *more*. It is needful, indeed, to grasp this truth—that when a man does nothing, he nevertheless *is* either what he ought to be, or less than he ought to be. The statement of religion is that he is less than he ought to be. Back of all the things we do—which may for the moment have no particular moral character or quality in themselves—lies the thing we are, which has and must have a particular moral character and quality ; and were it possible for us to suspend all activity, still we should *be* something, and that mysterious personality of ours which is hidden away behind all the processes of activity would be at some definite point of moral progress or retreat. It is with this that religion is concerned : it is the thing we *are* that religion declares to be faulty and half-developed and mixed with elements alien and harmful : it is this lack of moral quality in the actual make of us that religion christens sin ; and it is with this disease of moral con-

stitution in us that religion proclaims itself the only power able to deal.

A more particular realisation of what the general conception of sin contains may perhaps be gained when presently the idea of conversion (the positive idea whereof the idea of sin is the negative) comes under our thought. For the present it may suffice to say that when religion brings against humanity the charge of sin, it is but proclaiming imperfection in the thing we are—a proclamation, let it be repeated, which is made by the voice of experience before religion's voice is heard. Somewhere and somehow, we know, human life has missed its mark and gone astray: a rational philosophy emphasises the doctrine that all things are perfected as human life perfects itself through the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God; and religion, combining the two voices which thus have spoken, brings to human life the warning, "It is through lack of moral response from what you are to what God is that your sense of failure comes—I wake you to its seriousness, and

I proclaim that in myself and in the forces  
I bring to bear on you lies the needed cure.”

V

In setting itself to deal with man's moral condition, religion therefore addresses itself to a real and living need. By some means man must produce, or have produced, within himself a response of his character to God's—a spiritual condition which shall bring back to God the circle of movement and evolution which started from God long ago. In its call to man to take heed, in its proffer of forces which shall correct man's bent and flawed moral development, in its insistence upon a right relation between God and man—religion makes no intrusion, does not elevate to the chief place matters which are really of only subordinate concern, but takes up a problem which by its very nature stands in the forefront. What the utterances of religion concerning this supreme question really mean—and how far, as we come to understand them, they commend themselves to us as a final

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solution of the moral difficulties of life—these things have of course to be further considered. But when religion emphasises the fact that what man must seek for is a spiritual condition which shall correspond with the being of God Himself, which shall make man give to God the response of moral qualities kindred with His own, it is but propounding a doctrine to which experience and philosophy alike assent.





### III

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WHAT has in the preceding pages been called "the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" is of course what religion, in its own particular terminology, denominates "conversion." Or, if one is to keep strictly upon the line of exactness, it may be said that the phrase "the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" indicates the ideal condition that is to be attained, while the term "conversion" indicates the process of attaining, the movement out of a previous non-ideal condition into the ideal condition named. For practical purposes, however, it will be allowed that the phrase and the term may be treated as interchangeable; and we may say that to

be converted is to possess within ourselves such moral qualities as answer to moral qualities in God.

To emphasise and reiterate this significance of a frequently misunderstood, or inadequately understood, word, is the object of the chapter now begun. What does religion mean when it inscribes the word "conversion" upon its banner as being the word which all in the ranks must repeat with their lips, and the word which points the goal whereto the inner experience of all must be guided? It is the standard religious word for the ideal life and the ideal condition—and a word supremely adequate, so long as its significance be fully grasped, and so long as persistent and long-continued usage do not deface its brightness and lead men to hold it cheap. It is, indeed, the one perfect word, since such an entire transformation as it etymologically suggests is essentially what is required in the moral condition of man if it is to correspond with the character of God. And yet, because words, passed on from lip to lip through the ages, ultimately become

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degenerate words—at least, because men's understanding of them degenerates, and their fixed settlement into speech or prayer causes the mere sound of them, in its constant prominence, to hide their meaning at last—it may be a wise and necessary thing to seek a fresh realisation of their content. To re-read the significance of the word “conversion” in the light of the phrase “the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God,” may result both in a clarifying of thought and in a quickening of the experience which should follow.

### I

The ideal condition is to be “converted,” to possess within ourselves a correspondence of moral qualities with the moral qualities in God. Or, to put it in another and perhaps a more forcible way—in what man is (and each word of the phrase needs to be carefully weighed and appreciated), in what man is, in his character, in the substance of his moral

personality, he is to be made out of the same material as God Himself. It is only by employing some such expression—an expression which may at the first hearing seem to have a touch of extravagance, or even of unintelligibility, upon it—that we can indicate the full significance of the idea behind. It is insufficient, for instance, to say that conversion means the living of a life pleasing in the sight of God ; for to put it thus immediately carries away the thought to externals, to the output of good deeds, to the programme of movement and activity which our days see carried through ; and so the idea of the “moral material” whereof the inmost man is made is apt to drop wholly out of sight. Such conceptions of conversion as are fixed in the mind through the use of phrases like these mistake the part for the whole, or the result for the primary thing. But the actual constitution of man’s entire nature out of good, as God’s own nature is constituted out of good—our gradual penetration into the profound meaning of that phrase sets the conception of conversion at its proper lofty

level, and forbids inadequate conceptions to intrude.

We are carried back, on this line of thought, to what was said in the previous chapter concerning the distinction between what we do and what we are. The distinction is one of which even religious people lose sight not seldom ; and yet it is a distinction which needs to be properly appreciated if the meaning of conversion is to be grasped. For it is in what we *are*—in the personality, the foundation substance, which lies back of all outward activities—that the change described by the word must be wrought. The idea of a transformed individuality is an unfamiliar idea to most : improvements in conduct we know ; but the idea that there is a possible *becoming* of the inner self till it is transmuted into higher quality, a culture of personal character quite apart from any external manifestations of it, has faded away. This, nevertheless, is the range of ideas with which the idea of “conversion” corresponds. It may seem a strange thing to say in a period which will admit value in nothing that is not concrete

and tangible, but we require to recover a hold upon the abstract conception of goodness as a "thing," if it may be so called, whereof the inmost self of us ought to be made. This was the idea of the old Hebrew prophets: "righteousness"—not a mere outside morality, but something different from that—was what they proclaimed; and they instanced concrete illustrations of virtue which their hearers were to show far less frequently than they inculcated the abstract ideal. Moral condition, as distinct in itself from all else, was a real thing—an actual entity—with them and with those to whom they spoke. With us the idea of character, as distinct from conduct, is lost: we have no conception of what a man *is* apart from what he *does*: moral condition, as a reality within, a substance (the admittedly inappropriate word must be employed, since no better is at hand) which may be either good or bad, is not thought upon. Yet it is with the inner moral substance of us that conversion is concerned; and to be converted means to have the bad or mixed materials, out of which that inner moral substance

has been constituted hitherto, replaced by good.

The ideal condition for us—let it be repeated—is to be *made of* goodness; and it is by the degree in which human experience approaches that ideal that the reality of conversion may be gauged. The mere negative and colourless virtue of abstinence from wrong is but a poor thing beside the positiveness of this reconstruction of the inner man. Far beyond the point of abstinence from wrong does the true idea of conversion take us. For our spirits to hold within them a fountain of holiness from which the streams of holy thought and holy deed flow ceaselessly forth; for the whole atmosphere of our natures to have no taint of moral poison in it, but to be made up of purest elements alone; for goodness to be the only hand that can play upon the key-board of our being; yea, rather, for our whole being to give out unchangingly the music of goodness because it is made of goodness and pervaded by goodness—that is the ideal. That is “conversion”—this positive possession of us by all



good impulse, this grip upon our nature of goodness as our nature's motive power. We are to be good, not in the sense that the majority of our actions are of moral worth, or that in the majority of our moral crises the will decides for the right, but in a sense deeper far. Just as when we say of a man that he is clever or artistic or musical, we mean that in the make of him there is some living quality which corresponds with the epithets we employ, a quality embedded in the very building of his nature—so is it to be said of us that we are good, in the sense that there dwells in us a living quality which answers to the term, built into the very framework of what we are. The illustration, however, notwithstanding that it may do some partial service, really fails; for to speak of a man's clever or artistic or musical endowments is to refer to but a part of what he is, while to speak of his quality of goodness is, or ought to be, to speak of him as a whole. We are to be *made of* that which is good.

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### II.

It follows from this that in the highest conception and experience of conversion no place for struggle remains ; and although the perfected experience be unknown to the soul, and no man yet attains, still it is necessary that the aim stand clear. To be in very truth made of goodness, as God is goodness ; to have a perfect correspondence of moral quality in us with moral quality in God—that implies a perfect rest from strife within. To say this is not to question the genuineness of any experience which professes itself to be conversion, but which is nevertheless conscious of inward tumult, of evil elements unsubdued, of a ceaseless “sifting as wheat” going on in the recesses of the soul : were the sense of inner conflict incompatible with a truly spiritual state, we should have mournfully to confess that a real saintliness has never yet been seen on earth ; for the spiritually greatest, like Paul, have felt the “other law” in their members warring rebelliously against the

spiritual law which occupied the throne. But nevertheless, could the ideal spiritual condition become real, struggle would be past. The conception of a full response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God carries with it the conception of a nature so established in good—or rather, of a nature in which good is so established—that moral crises are all done with and left behind. The heart in which goodness reigns supreme needs no more to be prevented from wrong. To be converted does not mean that the divine influences are now a kind of successful moral police, set on guard over us and baffling the efforts of the elements of disorder which sometimes stir within : it means that goodness is the actual, positive inspiring force by which our natures instinctively direct their course. It is a small triumph compared with the ideal, if we just avoid collapse when the hour of temptation overtakes us : so far from it being a hard thing for us to overcome the wrong, it is to be—according to the ideal reading of the matter—a hard thing, nay, an impossible thing, for the wrong to overcome us. The

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predisposition in us is to be, not for wrong, but against it. The character made of goodness could not live in fear of some Judas-element within it waiting to betray it to the foe. And in the conception of conversion which we hang in our mental gallery to inspire our spiritual ascent, this must be included—this passage beyond the boundaries of the realm where conflict rages into the serene land of perfect peace.

To sum up once more—the ideal condition, the condition in which the full significance of conversion is worked out, is the condition in which goodness has become a second nature to us, and in which our nature possesses and expresses, in its motives, its instincts, its activities, in all that it is, those same qualities which constitute the pure and holy nature of God.

## III

Beside this true conception of the ideal and religious life, much of the current religious experience makes but a poor show; and it

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may be well for a moment to set before our mental vision some of the lower peaks which our actual religious life is content to occupy, so that we may see how the mountain-summit to which a valid idea of conversion calls us utterly dwarfs them all. It has to be confessed that, as a matter of fact, there is very little of real moral re-construction involved in religion as religion is understood and practised by the majority of even sincerely religious people to-day.

With many, conversion means little else than the substitution of an attitude of attention, more or less emphatic, for one of inattention, to religious concerns. How many are there who satisfy themselves with adding religion on to their life as a sort of new interest demanding a certain amount of care, which they more or less readily accord? They permit the thought of God, and the other thoughts which derive from that parent thought, to occupy them at stated times of worship and at set hours of prayer: moreover, such thoughts as these are important enough in their scheme of life to assert them-

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selves before them at other times when they are on the verge of moral disaster : they *become* religious now and again. They take an interest in religion—sometimes an interest even passionate and intense. Converted they will of course claim to be. But such a conception of conversion as is embodied in a mere change of mental posture toward religious ideas has only to be set over against the conception contained in our emphasised phrases—the response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God, or actual moral re-construction of the deepest self out of good material—for its paltriness to be revealed.

The idea of conversion as a mere insurance against penalty is another inadequate conception of what conversion involves—a conception which is, in fact, nothing less than grotesque when set beside the true. That it is often explicitly disavowed is certainly the case ; yet even with many who would readily admit, so far as theory goes, that certainty of escape is an altogether insufficient account of what conversion means, such a certainty of escape remains the salient thing. It has to



be said, also, that the word "salvation"—a word full-charged with profound spiritual significance in the New Testament usage of it—lends itself somewhat to misinterpretation in this sense; and inasmuch it was a word which, with its kindred words, was frequently on the lips of Christ Himself to describe the *summum bonum* of human experience, it is taken frequently upon the lips of men to-day to do duty for the same description, only with nearly all the meaning that Christ gave to it emptied away. No one, remembering how Christ used, not this word alone, but other words besides, to indicate what He came to work out on man's behalf, can imagine that insurance against harm is the beginning and the end of what He intended the word "salvation" to stand for. His use, for instance, of the word "life" (which is really His key-word) is enough to thrust such an interpretation aside; and to think of Christ as One who held His principal ministry to be exhausted by freeing us from the apprehension of retributive justice, is surely to get all the emphasis and all the accents wrong. Such an idea of



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conversion is certainly removed by measureless distances from the idea of a response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God.

On a somewhat loftier plane stand those for whom conversion—in practice, let it be said once more, whatever the theory may be—means that God's help is now, under the changed conditions, secured to them in the moral struggle of their life, whereas they stood alone before. They see to it, by the employment of all the weapons of meditation and prayer they have at their command, that God's power shall come to the reinforcement of their own, so that the temptings of evil which have been too strong for them shall be baffled now : God and God's presence and God's help are counted now as the forces on which they depend : they are more hopeful as to escaping spiritual defeat and disgrace now that they have entrusted the chief command in their campaign to their sacred ally. There is room, of course, in a life which bases itself upon such a conception of religion as this, for aspiration and enthusiasm and devout-

ness of a quality most intense. Yet such a conception of the religious life does not carry religion far beyond Matthew Arnold's definition of religion as morality touched by emotion. This religion is, in truth, an effort to do right, with an emotional recognition of God behind it. It is far from answering to the terms we have taken as embodying what true conversion is—far from involving a re-casting of the moral material whereof we are made, or an actual substitution of goodness within us for the mixed elements that constituted us before.

The pity of it is that the old phrases of evangelicalism are still employed to label these and many other imperfect varieties of the religious life; and "conversion" or its equivalent "change of heart" is still the expression by which all describe the spiritual process that is to set them right, or is supposed to have set them right, before God. But, as has been said, there is nothing more ensnaring than an old expression with its old meaning lost. It is change of heart indeed—since "heart" really stands for the whole of me,

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the ultimate reality of me at the back of this my hand and voice and brain—that is required. But to remember God instead of forgetting Him, to be consciously dependent upon Him instead of proudly self-reliant, to acknowledge His authority and to plead for His grace instead of pushing Him aside—all that is only change of *mind*, if we look a little more closely at it, not change of *heart*. They over whom these changes have passed think differently about God now—that is all. It is admitted, of course, that certain consequences, in themselves worthy and up-lifting, may follow from the changed direction of thought; but essentially, change of mind sums up the whole. And so these peaks of religious experience, whatever may be their height, as compared with the flat levels of an unreligious life, are themselves low indeed beside the highest peak of all. Conversion—once again we come back from these inadequate interpretations to our fundamental idea—conversion means the actual moral reconstruction of us, the transforming of what we are.

IV

Whatever may be revealed in our subsequent study concerning the method by which such an entire transformation of our moral substance may be accomplished, it is an inevitable inference from what has been said that conversion is not a thing whereof we can think lightly, nor an experience that can be carried through without something of stress and even of difficulty and pain. As has been said, conversion, once fully experienced, must leave all moral struggle behind ; but in itself it is a thing so revolutionary that it cannot be attained with ease ; and although forces amply sufficient for the realisation of the experience may be at the disposal of those who seek, still it must remain true that this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting, and that only through tribulation can entrance into this kingdom of a renewed moral being be won. And the seriousness and weight of the problem needs to be comprehended if the experience is to be real.

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For conversion, be it remembered, is not a *constitution*, but a *re-constitution*: it is a re-making of what has been, in part at any rate, wrongly made: it is an occupation of the field of our nature by new forces—and in this is implied the expulsion of the old. One does not need to hold exaggerated views of human depravity in order to admit that we could put forward no claim to have our moral condition already considered ideal: when everything possible has been said by way of self-praise, it remains indisputable that with all our good much of evil is mixed: we are not *made of good*. Conversion therefore necessitates a deposition from its place and its function of every element alien to that goodness which is henceforth to be, not a part of the transformed nature, but the whole—and the living elements of our nature, whatever they may be, never surrender without a struggle, and never acquiesce in their own doom. The very thought of the ideal spiritual condition—certainly any rousing of a soul in the direction of its attainment—makes the newly awakened one aware that in his heart

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of hearts there is a house divided against itself, and that in the secret chambers of his personality the ideal finds both friends and foes. At the touch of the ideal the half-slumbering moral forces in us are bestirred, and the battle between those that make for good and those that are sworn to evil begins : the appeal of goodness makes civil war in the country we carry in our own hearts. Some realisation of these things falls to the lot of all who make any real approach toward understanding what is involved in being constituted out of the very qualities of goodness that constitute God Himself. The fact may have been extravagantly stated in theological dogmas and formularies—it is a fact nevertheless, and the voice of our own consciousness re-proclaims it even though the voices of dogma are still. Doubtless there are differences of temperament and of initial moral state : it need not be asserted that all must know the same measure of inward disturbance as the perfect life makes its appeal ; but there is not a single soul among the families of men that can adequately



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apprehend what the ideal condition is without becoming conscious of a strife within. Not one moves *wholly* out to meet the advancing ideal. There is always some murmured protest, some backward pull, some instinct that refuses. A true conversion therefore means the overcoming and the death of something in us that lives and is strong.

Christ's own treatment of the matter leads us on to the same line. One of His phrases declared that men must be born again. And a new birth must be preceded by death. Not an easy thing to face. And indeed, another of Christ's phrases (dealing also with the "new birth" in slightly varied form) explicitly declares conversion, salvation, to be not an easy, but a difficult thing. "For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way that leadeth unto life." Entrance into life, then, cannot be found without an experience of struggle; and the attainment of the *sum-mum bonum*, as Christ conceived it, is like the finding of an almost hidden road. Christ's phrases—ranging as they do round the ideas of being born again and of entering into



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life—banish once for all any possibility of remaining in unruffled ease as we attain to the ideal moral state, and introduce something of hardship and conflict (as to the exact measure of it required each soul must be its own judge) into the spiritual experience of all. To be re-born, to enter once more into life, we must first of all die. With a life in us already, and that life in so many ways different from, in conflict with, the life that is to be the making of us, there must be clashing and struggle and, it may be, agony of tears, before the new life can make us indeed. To bid that which has been making us submit itself to the knife and die, in order that something better may be born within and may make us henceforth, is a thing which means conflict and pain of soul for such men and women as we know ourselves to be.

If there seem to be discouragement in this, the discouragement will pass as we realise what forces we have at our command for the inevitable struggle, and understand more fully what may be called the spiritual adjustment

## CONVERSION

of the soul. But it is supremely necessary, however for an hour the soul's skies may be clouded thereby, that the conditions of the spiritual problem be grasped, lest we mistake an inferior spiritual experience, lightly won, for the sterling experience which comes only to those who pass through the fire. Conversion is the re-constituting of our moral being. Salvation means being new-born ; and *that* means a preliminary slaying of life which will not lightly yield itself to be slain. The death of what we are has to be faced if we intend, in Pauline phrase, to present ourselves unto God as alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God.



## IV

### THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

TO bid the mind pass from the topic of conversion to that of the Fatherhood of God may appear like bidding it make a passage to a quite unrelated theme. From the strictly logical point of view, no doubt the connection is not direct ; but in a discussion of spiritual experience, properly so called, the step is a perfectly natural one to take. For once the significance of conversion is understood, and once the fact is grasped that conversion implies the re-making of man from moral qualities kindred with God's own, the question immediately arises, How is a change so great to be secured ? How is man to be morally re-made ? And the answer is, Through the exercise of God's

Fatherhood—through God's Fatherhood becoming a real fact in the experience of man. Of course, this preliminary remark already carries us away from the commonly prevalent conception of God's Fatherhood: in the ordinary view, that Fatherhood is not a thing that can *become* a fact of experience: it *is* a fact antecedent to all experience; and while, as a fact, it may be more fully apprehended, it cannot grow into a truer reality than it has always possessed. Yet we may find reason, upon further consideration, to say that while in a sense all this is true, there is another and a deeper sense in which God's Fatherhood is a thing it rests with man to make real and operative in his own individual life, and that as man does this the otherwise insoluble problem of actual moral re-constitution finds its key. The point to be established, in brief, is this—that the Fatherhood of God, rightly understood and experienced, secures the conversion of man. When moment by moment God exercises a real spiritual parentage, so that all we are is born from what God is, then must every quality

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in us be like God's own—since every quality in us will be, in deed and in truth, ours only through its direct derivation from Him. Man's real affiliation of himself to God brings about a real reproduction of God's character within.

### I

It is a common assertion that the idea of God's Fatherhood came in Christ's teaching and revelation newly to the world, and that no glimmer of it had shone upon the mental sight of men before. And this is true, although how true can only be understood when the real significance of Fatherhood, as Christ proclaimed it, is grasped. If the Fatherhood of God mean no more than it is frequently taken to mean—if it hold within it only a doctrine of lovingkindness felt by God towards man, corresponding with and yet far exceeding, the lovingkindness felt by an earthly father towards his child, the statement that Christ's proclamation of it was the first which ever rung its sweet peal across the

world is indeed scarcely true ; for although Christ emphasised such ideas as these, gave them larger fulness and intensity, brought them down to be among the working forces immediately at man's disposal, they had, as a matter of fact, been previously hinted at, to say no more ; and the message is at least as old as the psalms that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." That God is *like* a father (and even our current conceptions of God's Fatherhood frequently take us little further than that) was no new thing.

But the Fatherhood of God, according to the conception of it which Christ intended to be the Christian conception for all time, was a new proclamation indeed. For, according to that conception of it, God's Fatherhood meant nothing less than this—that God is prepared at every moment to be the inspiration and the source of the life which moves and throbs in the spirit of man ; and older thought, even when it had entered into its most tender and most profound imaginations about God, never arrived at the idea of a



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relationship so intimate as that. The idea of God as Creator of the world and Maker of man was of course familiar: the idea that God might and would be gracious to the men whom He had made was also an idea which prophets and psalmists not seldom rejoiced in; but that idea falls short by far of any conception of real and living Fatherhood actually and ceaselessly connecting God's nature with man's. "Like as a father pitieth"—but that "like" pulls up the conception, so to say, and resolves it into an encouraging analogy instead of constituting it a literal fact: to say that God has in Him something of a father's quality is not to say that He is ready so to devote Himself to man that all the life of man's spirit shall be drawn from Him. In Christ's view—and Christ's view must surely be decisive for ours—God is prepared to be unceasingly the actual author of the life of man, to inspire man with that which is in Himself, to take upon Himself the responsibility, as it were, for all that man is. God's Fatherhood means, not that God takes an interest in us, but that we

need have no thought, no feeling, no living impulse in us which is not born at the moment straight from Him. God's Fatherhood is not so much a *fact* that has been as a *process* which may always be. God's Fatherhood means, not that God loves us *like* a father, but that if we on our side use the relation which on His side is begun, we may at every instant find our whole life re-made within us out of His own. God as Father wants to make and keep a straight line of spiritual heredity from Himself to us. And, strange as the phrase may appear, it may be said that the Fatherhood of God implies something deeper and even larger than love.

It will not be questioned that for Christ Himself God's Fatherhood was such a relation as has here been feebly described ; nor will it be questioned, surely, that what God's Fatherhood meant for Christ Himself, it should mean for us in our measure. God is, or wants to be, our Father in the same manner, even if it be impossible in the same degree, as He was the Father of the perfect Son. And Christ's thought of God as His Father went

far beyond God having sent Him, God watching Him from heaven, God taking a living interest in Him. It included all these things, of course, and yet transcended them all. Christ's consciousness was that at every moment God's thought, God's will, God's actual life, were being reproduced in Him—that the Son did nothing of Himself but what in that intimate communion which always subsisted between them He saw the Father do—that what was in Him was a copy of nay, a direct derivation from, what was in God. Not a showing on God's part of qualities *like* a father's—but the actual exercise of a spiritual parentage, making Christ in very deed One in whom God's nature dwelt. And God's Fatherhood to man must be taken to mean the same thing, to work in the same way, to involve the same consequences. God is ready, if man will have it so, to be the author and source of all that dwells in man—not to correct it, nor to help man in keeping it right—but to *make* it all from what dwells in Him. And that such a setting of God Himself within man is the end of the moral

problem by which man is beset—brings with it such an actual re-constitution as that whereof man stands in need—it requires no words to show. The Fatherhood of God, rightly understood and experienced, secures the conversion of man.

## II

It is a natural transition, from consideration of the relation in which God desires to stand towards man, to consideration of the relation in which man should stand towards God. It is obvious, indeed, that if God's Fatherhood be what has been just now suggested, God can only be Father, at any rate in the complete meaning of the word, provided that man rightly adjusts himself towards God, and permits that self-communication on God's part wherein Fatherhood consists. We look, as it were, on the other side of the same medal we previously handled when we ask, What is it to be God's child? What is sonship?

The word itself is a familiar one. But just

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as the significance of God's Fatherhood is too often attenuated in our comprehension, so is it with the Godward sonship of man too. To live as in the presence of God—to possess a tranquil certainty that between ourselves and Him all causes of offence and alienation are removed—to know many a visitation of His inspiring grace—to have Him showing Himself for our encouragement, for our restraint from all wrong, for our incitement to all good, at many hallowed hours set like sparkling jewels amid the common hours of the common day—these things and such as these embody the meanings which we usually consider to lie in the idea of being rightly related to the God and Father of all. But sonship has a deeper significance which none of these explanations serves to exhaust, and a significance which must be appreciated by us and transformed into a living experience for us and in us, if our soul's highest possible destiny is to be achieved. To be linked with God in such a relation as sonship really implies is not merely to live as in His presence, but to be so thrown upon Him that nothing makes

part of our life except what is started within us as He holds us fast—not to be constantly submitting our life, as *we* have made and are making it, to His oversight and direction and judgment, but constantly to receive our life, as *He* has made and is making it for us, and just to live out what He instils—not to be kept near Him, but to be subjected through and through to Him, our being dissolved in His, His being reproduced in ours. From God we came forth, with all the beginnings of life in us, the capacities for thought, the possibilities of action, the channels through which life must be set in flow: to God we are to come back, that He may Himself complete that which He has begun, and that He may fill up with His own thought the capacities for thought which He has created, and that He may Himself develop into activities of His own the possibilities of action which He has set within, and that He may set His own life coursing through all the life-channels He has formed. We are children of God when we throw ourselves so utterly upon Him that He may responsively throw Himself



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into us, when our relation to Him is such that we start or make nothing of the life in us for ourselves, but take all the life in us out of the impulses communicated from Him. This is the prayer wherein is uttered the aspiration of him who would be a son, "Let all channels through which any movement of life could find access to me be closed except the channel whereby Thine own life comes in; and moment by moment let all of life that is mine be born in me from Thee."

Of course, on this view of things man has to secure his affiliation to God—has, so to say, to give effect to the Fatherhood which God keeps ever potentially prepared; and God's Fatherhood, His willingness to be Father, becomes an intensification of the responsibility of man. God wanting to be Father—God ready and yearning to make my life a copy, a reproduction of His own—but He can be and do that only if I permit Him; and on me, on the decision of my will, it depends whether God's Fatherhood shall be, indeed, the source of all I am. I can seal or can make of none effect the Fatherly



relation which on His side God has formed. It is here that the analogy of human fatherhood fails: our earthly parentage is not a matter of choice on our part. But the spirit can affiliate itself either with the spirit which is in God or with the spirit which is in another than God—can choose its parent as it will. “Ye are of your father the devil,” said Christ to some. Was He repudiating for them the doctrine which for others He proclaimed? Was not God the Father of those to whom Christ spoke that scathing rebuke? Yes and no. Yes, because even in them something of the spiritual endowment which God gives from Himself to every man coming into the world was present still. No, because they had taken the spirit of evil, rather than the spirit of good and God, to be the source of life for them: they were inheriting, not from God’s life, but from a life which was not God’s. The offered Fatherhood it is in man’s power either to accept or to reject. A true sonship must be made in part from our side. And let it be said once more, that when God’s readiness to be really Father is

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met by man's readiness to be really a son, man's moral problem is solved; for that perfected and rightly adjusted relationship brings with it that entire re-constitution of character which is man's highest good. When God gives Himself, and man receives God, there exists of necessity that "response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" to which the name of "conversion" properly belongs. The Fatherhood of God, rightly understood and experienced, secures the conversion of man.

### III

But it may be objected that the idea of God's Fatherhood, as thus expounded, takes no account of, at any rate is not based upon, the idea of love. "You have built up a conception of Fatherhood with the main element left out," it may be said. What is the love of God, according to the view here set forth, and how and where does this conception of God's Fatherly relation with man

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place it? God's love and God's Fatherhood are usually taken to be practically interchangeable terms—if God's Fatherhood be construed after the manner followed in what has hitherto been said, does love remain still the central element of God's character and the principle by which all His relations with man are ruled? Is it still love out of which God's ministries toward man are born, and still love those ministries express?

Surely, if by love be meant the affection and disposition which alone deserves the name, love is readiness for self-communication, in some form or other; and the love of God is *the readiness for Fatherhood which dwells from the beginning in God's heart*. It is God's pressing of Himself upon man in order that He may be accepted as Father—God's potential Fatherhood, if one cares to put it so. God's love is God's desire to unite Himself with man as Father, and man with Himself as son. God's love is in a manner the preliminary to God's Fatherhood—His predisposition to unite man's nature and His own; and God is love, inasmuch as He is

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everlastingly offering Himself as the One prepared to be the source and spring of human life. It is a readiness for self-communication that alone deserves the name of love; and our conception of God's love is tuned to the true pitch, and reflects God's nature rightly, only when we take the love of God to be *God's pressure of Himself upon man with a view to that close union in which He is Father and man is son.*

The declaration that God is love is too frequently interpreted in a sense far feebler, and needs to be restored to its fuller force. For us, the doctrine of the love of God comes to mean simply that in Him there dwell kindness, graciousness, dispositions of gentleness and favour: "complacency" might almost be taken as the equivalent of "love" according to our frequent understanding of the word: the love of God presents itself to us as something in Him that softens down the sterner qualities He possesses, and prevents them from showing themselves at their height. God is the Judge who will by no means clear the guilty—yes, but He is love, and therefore

the sentence He passes upon guilt will have something of its severity toned away. God, acting upon the righteousness and the justice that are His, would take most strict account of every human word and deed and thought, rendering in equity to every man according to his works—yes, but He is love, and so these dealings of His with us will be made to depart in measure from the exact letter of the law, and His requitals will be generously modified from what they would else have been. “Love” is complacency, hesitation in judgment, willingness to allow another chance, and nothing more than that. God is love, men say—and with the saying of it the hard outlines drawn round about the nature of the Eternal become softened before their eyes.

It is not too much to say that this conception of the love of God entirely forgets what love is: certainly there remains, on this view, no relation between love and a true spiritual Fatherhood at all. Love, in its essence, is another and a far larger thing. Love is an active effort, on the part of him who loves, to unite with himself the object

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on which his love is set. Love goes forth upon the life beyond it and strives to bring that life back to its own, to assimilate the loved life with its own, to mix and blend the loved life with its own. Is love ever a thing that lets the loved life be, as men sometimes fancy God's love will let them be—a thing that refuses to trouble itself too much about the loved life, as men imagine God's love will refuse to trouble itself too much about them? Precisely the opposite of that, in all truth. You may minimise and extenuate the wrong that another has committed, but that is not love. You may be indulgent to another's faults, but that, while it may indicate pity, gentleness, any quality kindred with these, is not love. Love finds everything in the loved life to be a matter of surpassing concern, for love is striving ceaselessly to bring the loved one into union with itself, and must gaze with interest and care upon all that enters into the life of the loved, since by it all will that union be either retarded or advanced. Love has not done its work nor satisfied its desire when it has flung itself



forth upon its object—shown itself, so to say, to its object, and ended there: unsatisfied must it ever be, and incomplete must its work ever remain, until it has brought its object back to make it one with and like itself. Loving means that we want to have broken down whatever barriers sever from our inmost nature the inmost nature of those we love: to love them is to push the deep life in us close up to the deep life in them, and to strive then that the deep life in us and the deep life in them may intermingle, and be separated no more: deep calls to deep, and listens for the voice of the answering deep. So, when God is declared to be love, it means that out of all God is, an influence is being sent forth upon us to draw us into Him and to assimilate our life and nature to His own. It means, not that although He is so wondrous in His holiness, some other and tenderer quality in Him springs up to prevent His holiness from touching us too closely, but that out of His very holiness He is reaching out to touch us and take us back into His holiness and make us holy too. It means that, whatever God



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is, He is not only for Himself but for us—that we may be it with Him. God is love—not because He hides from us the greatness and the perfectness that are His, and reveals to us only the other side, the more gracious side of His nature, which our weakness may be more able to bear ; but God is love, because greatness and perfectness and all the infinite range of His nature are ever radiating out over us thousands upon thousands of influences and magnetisms and ministries whereby we are to be elevated to His height : God is great and holy and just and good, and He is love, not *in addition to* these things, but *through* all these things ; for in them all He is ever seeking to make us one with Himself. Love in God, as love in man, is that which will not leave the loved life alone, nor overlook one single element that goes to make it up, but which without ceasing goes out to, grasps at, broods over, the life that is loved, unsatisfied until it has taken the loved life into the depths of its own. And so we may repeat our earlier statement, that the love of God is the readiness for Fatherhood which

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dwells from the beginning in God's heart. It is God's love out of which God's Fatherhood comes ; and God's Fatherhood is God's love exercising itself, and intensified, so to say, from an eternal willingness to an actual spiritual force through the consent and submission of man.

### IV

Following this line of thinking, we reach a reconciliation of ideas which appear superficially irreconcilable, and find it a clear truth that the God who is or may be Father is the God who may also become the Judge. As has been already said, the Fatherhood of God is truly fulfilled only for those who will on their side assume the attitude of self-affiliation, and who thus allow all that they are to be moment by moment born from what God Himself is. God's love—God's eternal readiness for self-communication—passes into actual Fatherhood for those who let it have its way. But it is the correlative of this—

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it is, from this standpoint, a perfectly natural thing—that to the resisters the love which, had there been yielding in place of resistance, might have fulfilled itself as Fatherhood, should become a disturbing, even in a most real sense a hostile, influence instead. And man needs to remember, whenever the spiritual problem of his nature presents itself or is suggested to his thought, that just because God in His love has provided the solution for it, a refusal of the love-provided solution must turn God into a foe. God's enmity is but God's arrested love.

For one thing, it follows from what has been said concerning the love of God—from our definition or exposition of it as God's pressure of Himself upon man with a view to that close union in which He is Father and man is son—that every man is forced into a definite attitude towards it, and that the heart of every man is compelled to some clear response, whether of acceptance or of rejection, to the heart of God. "A refusal of the love-provided solution" was the phrase just now employed; and "refusal" is the

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accurate word, for an ignoring of it, in the nature of things, there cannot be. God is love, and unceasingly love—that is, without intermission is He casting over us the influence that is meant to carry our natures back into His; and the active influence of love is a thing that must be either received with gladness or thrust deliberately aside. To mere liking we can be neutral: it calls for no particular response; and we can therefore leave it to spend itself as it may. But to love we are compelled to respond with either “yea” or “nay.” Love, being what it is, thrusts itself upon us. It may be welcomed. It may be spurned. Ignored it cannot be. If the love of God be the ceaseless effort of God’s life to master and absorb man’s, man must be ceaselessly responding to that effort with a heart that either refuses itself or submits. If God be love, man is driven into definiteness of attitude towards God.

But if the attitude be one of rejection, what then? What can happen but that the very pressure of God upon man will become an irritation and a hostility instead of a

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grace? "With the perverse thou wilt show thyself froward" is one of the terrible brevities set down on the Scripture page. How can that be true of a God whose love never wears away? Nay rather, *must* it not be true of a God whose love never wears away? It could not be true, certainly, if love were mere amiability, as so many take God's love to be. But if God's love be an actual influence, ceaselessly at work to uplift the loved ones to the level of Him who loves, to shape and form and mould them—if God's love be a ceaseless effort to make a real and energising Fatherhood—must not love itself become something which those who do not yield to it feel to be actually *against* them? It is against *them* because they set themselves against *it*. God loves—that is, there are ever coming forth from Him the educating and shaping forces which want to take us into their charge, which are not for a moment content to leave us to ourselves. If we drop into their outstretched arms, it is well. If we hold back, love's forces interfere and plead and warn and become very spirits of the

disturbance to the unyielding heart. Love is God's interference with man, not merely God's amiability towards man; and as man refuses to let Him interfere, man finds God to be against him, just because God loves. It is the very activity of God's ministries that brings Him into conflict with those who would rather He let them be. What the changeless God of love will be to man depends upon what man is. Did God change as man changes, there might be harmony between Him and man through all man's changing moods. But since He changes not, it is man that determines what for man God's changeless character will be. God's very changelessness makes Him a changed God when man has changed from submissiveness to refusal. Man holds between his soul and the eternal light the coloured glass of his own disposition and mood, deciding thus how in his nature the light is to shine. Accepting God's self-offer, we find Him in harmony with the spirit we show: dissociating ourselves from Him in disobedience or heedlessness, we find that He, though the lover still, is turned



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against us now. In a manner, each man makes his own God ; and one puts it not too strongly when one says that through man's rejection of God's offered self-communication the God who was love becomes a God who—though love still—is now also a consuming fire.

It stands clear, then, that out of the love of God—out of God's pressure of Himself upon man—comes, unless man otherwise decides and makes love of none effect, that Fatherhood which is the solution of man's spiritual problem, and which brings about that entire transformation of moral substance and quality which man needs in order that the flawed nature he bears may be made whole. God's love passes into Fatherhood or into judgment, according as man adopts or refuses the solicitations it ceaselessly advances. In those who, under love's invitation and pressure, allow themselves to experience a true sonship, is born the otherwise impossible "response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" ; for they themselves are born again.





## V

### REPENTANCE

IF now we assume that some soul, considering the problem of its condition and its destiny, has thought its way through so far, and has arrived at an understanding of the fact that it must, in order to attain its perfecting, allow God's love to pass into actual and active Fatherhood, and must secure its own affiliation to God—what must be the attitude it takes up toward its own past? The question presses; for with the majority of men, as they realise the spiritual adjustment required in the ideal condition, there will come also a realisation that this is not the adjustment which from the beginning they have made. It is not the case that

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what they have been has been moment by moment born out of what God is—and this quite irrespective of the character of any particular deeds they have performed. Life has not been exclusively this flowing through the channels of their nature of the waters from a sacred spring. What of the life, not God-born, that lies behind?

It is here that religion comes in with its primary demand (primary, that is, in time), placing at the starting-point of the new spiritual history *repentance* for the inadequacy and wrong of the history gone by. But what is to be understood by the word? What is the spirit and temper in which the man who would be new-born is to look back on the unregenerate method of life from which he would be dissociated henceforth? What emotion should the remembrance of it stir within? What is the repentance which will stand as a real commencement of a fresh spiritual process—the repentance which, precisely because it is a true feeling about the past, will contain also a promise for the future—the repentance which will serve as a plat-

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form whence he who experiences it may leap to higher things?

### I

It is, of course, a truism to say that repentance must involve a recognition of the actual facts—and yet, truism as it is, to say this is to say all. For the actual facts stand thus—life, in so far as it has not been made from the God-source, has in its measure been a disordering of God's universe, an arrest of that process of things whereby God wanted the End to be linked back to the Beginning again, a definite rejection of that desire for self-communicating Fatherhood which God's heart has always held. And repentance must be an adequate recognition of the fact that the life not God-born has been *an injury to God*. The salient element of a true repentance lies, not in a confession that this or that deed has been of inferior quality or worthy to be utterly condemned (else were repentance a thing whereof the required

amount varied in different cases according to the brevity or length of memory's catalogued crimes)—still less in dread of penalty—but in the soul's consciousness that its past withholding of itself from the offered God-attachment has been a wrecking of God's fore-ordained system of things, and consequently a hurt and harm to God Himself.

To put it in another and a more intimately personal fashion—the truly repentant spirit thinks far more of what it has done to God than of what God may do to it. There is no repentance adequate to the situation if man merely throws up his hands in agonised appeal when he realises that his foolishness has brought him to the verge of disaster, if he calls wildly for salvation (and for a salvation which has scarcely any moral content at all) upon a God whom he neglected till the crisis came. It is not denied that with an emotion like to this repentance and religion will sometimes begin: fear may sometimes serve as the initial impulse, and be followed later by a far deeper feeling coming in its train; but a repentance which not only thus

begins, but which goes no further, is not a sufficient stirring of the heart in the situation created by the heart's refusal to be God-born hitherto. The true temper of repentance, let it be repeated, thinks much more of what we have done to God than of what God may do to us ; and it realises that we have wrought upon God, so to say, something which we have no power to set right ; and its sorrow is, not that there is waiting for us some punishment of which we are afraid, but that we have interfered with and confused, beyond all our skill of repairing, the spiritual order in which God had meant to find His joy.

"I have done something to throw God's world in ruins ; and be His judgment what it may, I have put myself beyond all title to complain. I have dared, by my refusal to fall into the relationship in which He intended my life to lie—I have dared to put forth my hand and disorder what He made fair, break that ordained process of things which was precious in His sight." It is on what the soul's past aloofness has done to God, on the havoc it has wrought in God's universe,

on the check it has placed on God's planning, and on the consequent sadness God's heart has been compelled to endure,—it is on these things that a true repentance will spend its grief. For only thus does the repentant nature take up the attitude to its past which is required by the fact that its past has been a rejection of that desire after a self-communicating Fatherhood which God's heart has always held.

In thus shifting the main emphasis of repentance from the wreck of man's own prospects to the disorder of God's purposed plan and to the consequent wounding of God Himself, we do not make of repentance a less poignant thing, nor bring down the thermometer that measures its intensity by so much as a single degree. Indeed, the soul which realises what its withholding of itself means to God must—if it have any capacity for worthy feeling left in it at all—experience a far sharper pain than that which attacks the soul whose repentant sorrow regards only its own liability to judgment and retribution. For the question it has to meet and answer



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is not merely whether it can prepare itself to take the consequences of persistent self-alienation, let them be what they may, but the more solemn question whether it can endure to wound an active love by lovelessness, whether it can suffer the consciousness of having dimmed the glories of God's heaven. A man must have sunk low indeed if he remain wholly unmoved by the thought that his own loss means loss to God. The repentance which realises that fact will be a searching, rending experience indeed. And it is from this point of view that we understand how the preaching of God's love as the central and foundation quality of God's nature intensifies human duty, deepens human responsibility, condemns—sternly condemns—human sin. “Your preaching of the love of God, and of that Fatherhood which you declare God holds ever ready, is apt” (they sometimes say) “to make little of right and wrong, of duty and transgression, of sin and repentance.” Nay, but the preaching of love and Fatherhood—if love and Fatherhood be understood in the sense in which we have read them—

makes more of all these things. When we grasp what love and Fatherhood mean, all these spiritual realities are realities tenfold; and repentance is for the first time raised to its true intensity and height. When we want to realise the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we have but to say within ourselves that God's purpose is thrown to ruin, at any rate so far as our part in it is concerned, when we withhold ourselves from His self-communicating affection, and that His heart is left pained and lonely when we refuse Him the perfecting of the relationship He seeks to form. And only the soul which is swayed by such thoughts as these will know the keenness and poignancy of a repentance corresponding to the greatness of the call it has refused.

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### II

It is in this conception of what repentance is that we find the reply to one of the questions we asked at the outset—the reply, namely, to the question, “What is the repentance which will stand as a real commencement of a spiritual process—the repentance which, precisely because it is a true feeling about the past, will contain also a promise for the future—the repentance which will serve as a platform whence he who experiences it may leap to higher things?” He whose sorrow for the life that lies behind is pre-eminently a realisation of what that life has wrought in injury and pain to God, will be both expectant of, and fitted to employ, whatever forces God may set in operation to redeem and reconcile alienated man.

It is, in other words, precisely out of the spirit of true repentance that the spirit of true and worthy hope arises: it is the man thrust low enough into the depths who,

looking up, can see the stars. It is just when we realise what sin has done to God that we realise also how impossible it is for God to let us be. The God who, as my sin obtrudes itself upon His sight, feels Himself to be touched by something unworthy of Him, and finds His ordered design, so far as I am concerned, brought to arrest,—He will surely strive to make me worthy of Him again, so that He may be hurt and thwarted by my unworthiness no more. And so, it is just in realising and brooding upon what sin has done to God that there begins hope of what God will do for us.

Did it seem as though there were no room left for any gospel if repentance be what has here been described? A truly repentant spirit is not consumed merely by passionate desire to avert the judgment it has deserved, does not fling itself merely into fevered and oft-repeated supplications that God will not be too hard on it, but thinks much more of what it has done to God than of what God may do to it—but how then is any redeeming

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ministry to be drawn out of the God whom we have offended? Does not this view of repentance deprive us of the direct appeal to God's pity which, on the other view, our repentance makes? No. At any rate, if in any measure it does this, it provides a still better ground of hope. God's redeeming ministries come out of the very pain He feels at the touch of human sin: if man's evil is to God an insult and an affront which stirs God's being with the pain of many a wound, He will surely somehow find means to ward away the evil that pains Him so; and God can only save Himself from the hurt of man's sinfulness by saving man from sin. It is the sin-injured God that will fly down to degraded man to uplift him: it is the God who cannot bear the contact of sin that will create redemptions for sin's destruction and for the deliverance of the sinful soul. The surest ground for expecting the salvation of God is in the understanding of what, to God Himself, sin is. Out of the very "indignation" of God—out of that movement of heart which sin must stir in Him—

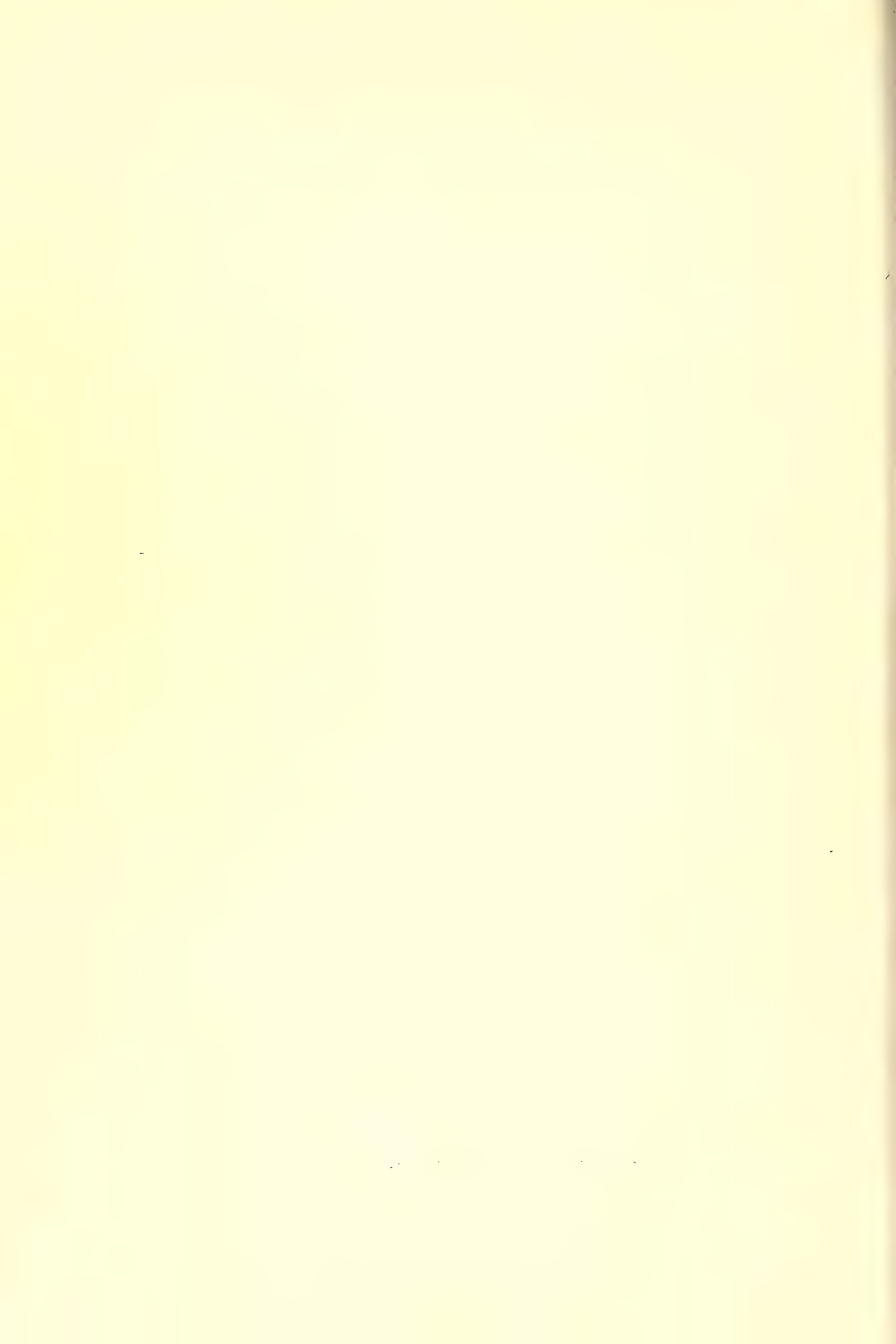
does God's salvation come. We lose nothing of hope if we make our repentance turn from brooding upon what God may do to us to brooding upon what we have done to God. A sadder repentance, at first, this may be: a repentance out of which a new hope arises, it will prove itself ere long.

If repentance, then, is to be really the beginning of life's spiritual enrichment, repentance must be something else and something more than another name for fear. A repentance which is only the expression of fear produces no real moral and spiritual reconciliation, however it may presently lead to a smoothing over of the apprehensions that gave it birth; and it cannot be—if it stop short at this its early and inadequate stage—the starting-point of a true spiritual advance. That repentance may sometimes *begin* in fear has been admitted; but the repentance which *ends* in fear, and does not pass on to a larger realisation of the situation which sin has brought about, has no promise of an actual restoration of good. The repent-

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ance which fixes itself upon what sin has done to God is the repentance not to be repented of—and the repentance which results at last in the bringing out of the sinner's righteousness as the noon-day.





## VI

### CHRIST AS LIFE-GIVER

THUS far, then, we have traced the spiritual problem which man must face; and we see him now, dissociated in a true repentance from his past, and realising that he needs—in order to secure that “response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God” whereby alone can life be made complete—to become in very truth and fact God’s son. He has to enter into a real spiritual affiliation Godwards; he has to set himself into such an attitude of nature, to come so close to God, that God’s love, which has been ever pressing forth to find him, shall pass into an actual and active Fatherhood out of which he shall moment by moment be born anew. He has—in Christ’s own

brief and significant phrase—to “come to the Father,” in order that he may establish himself as the child.

But the statement of the problem inevitably brings with it a realisation of its greatness—not to say a realisation of the impossibility of fulfilling its demands. How, between the soul of man and the God whom no man hath seen at any time, can there be formed a relation so intimate as that required? If there be no perfect condition of soul except in this close linking of it with God, the soul (so in his despair man is moved to cry) must lie for ever unperfected: if such a relationship be the distant goal, no power man can wake within himself will ever construct any road whereby man may reach it: before a destiny so surpassing as this we can but lie powerless, dazzled into utter bewilderment by the very glory of it, bereft of strength to rise at all by the very remoteness of the summit to which we are called to rise. Man has to “come to the Father”—yes, but impenetrable mists float over and hide the secret place where He dwells, and clouds and darkness

are round about Him, and because we cannot see nor hear nor touch Him, all our steps in search of Him would be fitful and faltering and slow, and we should but lose our way. Man has to "come to the Father"—we know just enough about Him to make such an enterprise a painful and futile thing. Life's redemption in being thrown upon God, so that God may ceaselessly throw Himself into life and reproduce in our life what is in His—but to weak and struggling spirits, incompetent to do much for the realisation of such a marvellous dream, must not the whole thing be a dream, and a dream only, and all words about it vain? Coming to the Father—what arm can reach so high? What foot can travel so far?

But religion leaves these bewilderments not without relief and reply. This is its message—What if, knowing that only in "coming to Him" can we be blest, and knowing too that we cannot come, God comes to us? What if, knowing that we cannot overpass the appalling distances, God Himself steps across them, and, presenting Himself to us

down upon the levels we cannot leave, invites us, "Come now"? Then, surely, the dream of a life ceaselessly born in us from God grows real—then, surely, words about it are vain no more! And religion has to speak of One who, in the calm consciousness that He came forth from God, made the great declaration, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and who, confident that He was in the Father and the Father in Him, claimed to be the Way, and the Truth, and the Life,—so that men, powerless as they were to move up to the Father in the far eternities wherein He dwelt, might nevertheless come to the Father through coming to Him. The assertion to be made of Christ is this—that the God whom man could not seek and find has in Christ come to seek and find man, that man, who might vainly strive to attach his life to the life of God, has now in Christ the life of God striving to attach itself to the life of man. Christ's ministry was and is to bring man to God by bringing God to man. And Christ holds locked in His nature the secret of our life's supreme fulfilment because

His nature is itself the nature of the Father with whose nature ours needs to be made one.

## I

The preliminary statement, as thus made, needs to be somewhat expounded and amplified in order that its significance may stand out clear. The conception goes far beyond that of Christ as a *revelation* of God. The place of Christ in the spiritual development of man—the place of Christ among the spiritual forces, if it may be so put, which man has at his command as he seeks to come into a true relation with God—is not understood until we understand that utterance of the Fourth Gospel, that as the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself. That is, the divine life, *together with the power of communicating it*, which are in God, have been by God Himself imparted to Christ—so that for man to attach himself, as a recipient of life, to Christ, is the same thing as to attach himself, as a

recipient of life, to God. The divine life takes its stand, in Christ, upon man's platform, so that man may find it near. God puts Himself in Christ—and man, casting himself upon and into Christ, finds God in Him.

Communication of the divine, not merely revelation of the divine, is therefore the phrase which rightly describes Christ's ministry to men. Christ is far more than a *revelation* of God. The phrase which so describes Him is of course accurate enough, so far as it goes : He is the revelation, so illumining that beside it all other revelations are thrown into shadow, of what God is. But He is not only the revelation of the divine life. He is the divine life setting itself into channels of self-communication to man ; and one needs, in order to take the measure of His mission rightly, to follow the suggestion contained in the Apostle Paul's declaration (in truth the whole system of practical Christian doctrine lies there) that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full." Not only does Christ, as it were,



contain God, but He passes God into man. "In Him ye are made full." The whole point is that the fulness of the divine is in Christ in order that man may in his turn be filled ; and Christ not only shows what God is, but imparts God to man. A revelation implies no more than a mere throwing before the sight of the world, as on some screen which all eyes can see, of the thing revealed ; but in Christ far more is done for us than that. He not only shows to us, in word and deed, and in all the lessons we may draw out of His word and deed, the secrets of the unseen eternal nature, whose secrets we so much want to learn : He not only acts out God before us, but He comes, possessing the fulness of the divine life in Him, and possessing also the power of self-communication to us. This life of God—so runs the proclamation to be made on His behalf,—this life of God, in possession of which alone can you reach your destiny, but which, though you need it so, is so far above your highest and most straining reach, approaches you in Him ! In your need of it, give up looking for it far and far away,

end the feverish struggles to find the divine life, and to draw it out of the eternities into yourself! Find it here in Christ—for it is nigh you, and the stretch of the weakest arm is long enough to reach it now! Not only a revelation of the fulness of God, but an imparting of it to us; and we, who have to seek for the fulness, are sought and found by the fulness; and in Christ the divine life we want to make our own bestows itself in unstinted measures upon the needy ones we are.

It is thus that there becomes apparent the broad line of distinction between the revelation given in the Christ and all other revelations that had gone before. God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers by divers portions and in divers manners, now at the end of the days spoke in His Son. That is, in brief, Christ, being the Son, brought the actual nature and life of God down among the world of men, in contrast to the revelations *about* God which were all that prophets could give. The prophet speaks about God—the Son brings God. The prophet looks upon

God and tells men what he sees—or he is looked upon by God, and tells men what thoughts and emotions are quickened in him under God's look. The Son is, by a perfect spiritual heredity, an embodiment of God. All other revelations bring God's influences at second-hand into the sphere of human experience: this revelation is the direct action of God's nature and life upon man's. The prophet's message is a thing entirely separate from what the prophet is; and you can in thought divorce the revelation which comes through him from the personality which is in him: the message of a Son is mixed with and undistinguishable from the nature and the character He bears; and it is His sonship that constitutes the revelation. Revelations *about* God before—a revelation *of* God now. Not only does Christ tell us more about God than any other had done; not only does He speak with certainty where others spoke with something of doubt, with perfect grip upon His subject where others had gaps in their knowledge and lameness in their understanding; He changes the whole method, and,

in place of helping us to think of God and imagine God, brings God's nature as a living reality to our level, and bids us taste and see. Other revelations are like turning the pages of a guide-book : this revelation is like travelling through a new land ; or, other revelations are like reading the description of what some one is, building up a mental image of him as particular after particular is grasped : this revelation is like standing before the stranger face to face. And man, as he comes face to face with Christ, needs to realise that in Christ there are not simply new thoughts about God which man is to understand, new lessons about God which man is to spell out painstakingly until they become clear, but the very life and nature of God Himself seeking to take grip upon man and making its own direct appeal. Because Christ is the Son, the question that calls for settlement about Him is not, How understand His teaching ? but, How use *Himself* ?

## II

Man's spiritual problem, then, may be re-stated once more; and it is thus that the statement now will run—man has to receive into himself the life that is in Christ. For, doing that, man does all; and in that one attainment all other things—sonship, response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God, conversion—are attained. And it is as Life-giver that Christ must be understood and taken; for no smaller conception or usage of Him answers to the greatness of what He is. It is necessary to insist on this, for it is possible to hold high estimates of Christ, and yet to fall short of the highest, and the only worthy estimate, after all. Our current estimates of Christ frequently go no further than taking Him as only the supreme revelation *about* God, as the highest prophet of them all. The reference, in saying this, is not to those who deliberately thus frame their creed, and hold Christ to be but the man of deepest insight into what God is. The

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strange thing is, that many who would repudiate the Unitarian creed, really possess little else than the Unitarian Christ; and although professing to believe without reserve in the divineness of Christ, use Him as though He were but the greatest of the prophet-line. Our efforts simply to understand Christ, to take something from Him (as if we could take His best gifts *from* Him without taking Himself), to derive benefit from what He has said and done, are not the way to employ a revelation like this. We might employ a prophet so; but a Son, with God's life in Him, must be met by a different attitude from that. He comes to be the actual Life-giver to us, the actual Life-maker in us—and must so be received. In our conceptions and estimates of Christ we need to settle it definitely for ourselves what is to all ages His greatness for men—and to settle it thus. That on our own level He meets us, and by meeting us there carries us up to the pure heights of God—that by the sweetness of a friendly, brotherly companionship He introduces us to God and God into us—that is Christ's glory



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and power. And this is the aim of all His working, the meaning of all His influence, the object of every touch He lays upon human spirits and of every call He sends to human hearts—this is the final end of the words He spoke, of the life He lived, of the death He died, of the life He lives again,—so to draw men into oneness of heart and soul with Himself that they should live by the inspiration of that perfect communion, and thus be made one with God. It is as the Life-giver that Christ must be received.

It is, indeed, precisely as we raise our conception of Christ and of Christ's ministry to this high level that we find the problem of the soul made a simple thing. If Christ be actually and literally the Life-giver—the One who, possessing God's life within Himself, sets God's life into man—then there remains but one thing for us to do. For, receiving Christ, we receive life; and, receiving life, we receive all. All those needs of our nature, which we counted off as our earlier pages passed on, will be satisfied through our coming into true relations with the Life-giver; for



“life” covers the whole list. That matching of the world without to the world we carry within—and this, we saw, is the final formula, as it were, in which our nature’s requirements are summed up—is provided for when we say that in Christ the eternal life communicates itself to man: no unfulfilled requirement, then, can remain. Would we understand the all-sufficiency of Christ’s ministry, this, therefore, is how it must be conceived. Whatever words we employ to describe Christ’s influence upon and Christ’s work for man, this, if we would grasp the full range, the large sweep of it, is what it must essentially be taken to be—the establishment of us in such relations with the eternal world, and of the eternal world in such relations with us, that the eternal life becomes ours, and that the sense of vanity or of futility in life, or in any part of life, shall haunt us no more. In the eternal world as He reveals it—the world of God and God’s character and God’s goodness—in that He brings near to us the response to every instinct and aspiration of ours; and in His influence upon

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us, He so arranges and orders the instincts and aspirations in us, that they shall be rightly related to that eternal world of God and God's character and God's goodness ; so that, by bringing near to us the world beyond, for which apart from Him we have sought in vain, and by making the world within, which has been, apart from Him, so disorganised and chaotic and wasteful of its powers, to point itself to the world beyond, He ends the want of harmony through which life has been kept so poor, and causes it to be life indeed. He is the Life-giver : He is therefore all, and does all. All other things that we say about Him are but adjuncts to—or rather, implications contained in—the one central and essential thing. He came to be Saviour from sin, to assist us in the arduous quest of good : He came to be Consoler in sorrow, to make us see that the dark robes of pain and death clothe a figure not so grim and threatening as we had thought ; and these ministries of His are wondrous and sweet past all words. But we say all that—because we say far more—when we say that

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He came to give life. The greater includes the less. And for all the many problems which have puzzled it the soul may substitute the one problem now, and may take this question as containing all the elements of its problem brought down to their lowest terms, yet in another sense brought up to their highest terms nevertheless—"How may I rightly relate myself with the Christ who has life in Himself?" The effort to realise in our experience the life of God resolves itself into the effort to make our inward life touch upon and be inspired by the inward life of Jesus Christ. The secret of all true religious experience comes to be this—God's life ruling in our natures through the communion of our natures with the nature of Jesus Christ. The soul may re-state its problem in those terms: Do we think that the reign of God over our characters is an idea far too high for our attainment? Is God too remote and dim? Well, but here, in Christ, we have the very life of God meeting us down upon the low human level where we stand. If we cannot stretch up to the highest heaven,

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and, so to say, bring God down from there to occupy the place of authority within us, we *can* draw near to God as He draws near to us in Christ, and can submit ourselves to God's spell and sway as it touches us through what Christ is. The divine life out of which our life is to be born makes its visitation to us and its settlement within us through the union of Christ's spirit with ours. It is as Life-giver that Christ must be understood and received.

### III

If it be asked by what right, and on what authority, this reading of Christ's mission and ministry is asserted to be true, the answer is that it was thus Christ always presented Himself to man. As has been previously said, "life" was really His keyword; and of Himself He always spoke, not as One who preached life or explained it, but as One who gave it out of the life He Himself possessed. He would not have

His disciples look on Him as a Teacher who came to speak to them *about* things, prone as they were to drop their estimate of Him down to that level: it was in what He was, in His personality, in Himself, that they must learn to look for the secret He brought. When they vexed themselves concerning the way to the Father, mournfully declaring that they had no knowledge of its course, Christ's answer was that it was not primarily a thing to be known in the intellectual sense at all. "I *am* the way," was His word. "The finding of a right relation with God is not a thing to be chiefly thought about, but a thing to be achieved simply by the soul's surrender to Me!" The disciples would be brought to God, not by taking the first hint of new knowledge from Christ's lips and then working the thing out by the efforts of their own mind (and this was what they were always attempting to do), but by abandoning themselves to the Christ Himself. Christ's claim for Himself is that with a real submission to Him there disappears all the mystery of man's spiritual advance to God: the mind

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which loses itself in Him, the heart which gives itself to Him, the soul which allows Him to enfold it—these have put themselves beyond all experimentings and past all uncertainties, and may know themselves to be set on the straight road. Christ comes—He wanted them to understand—not as others have come, merely to make suggestions about this great problem of finding the Father, or to offer a more likely solution of the question than has been offered before, or to hearten men to re-commence their searching when futile searches have tired them out, or to tell men something about the matter which they have forgotten or have never known, but He comes to end the whole thing by simply taking hold upon human nature with His own. He does not even come to *show* the way,—He comes to *be* it. That nature of yours, which you cannot move toward God—let Mine take grip of it, and toward God it will have moved already. That anxious struggling of yours to shape out a right relationship to God—end it, and drop into My grasp: while I hold you, a right



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relationship to God will follow from My holding, as surely as the opened flower will follow from the bud. Into the midst of a world perplexed as to how it may traverse the painful way which separates it from its God and its home, Christ comes, giving the answer not so much by what He says as by what He is, and by the power His personality can exercise upon ours. How may man's baffled heart find the road to God? "Simply surrender it to Me, and at once it is set upon the road!" Searchings done with, and an abandonment of the searching spirit to the enfolding of the Christ-spirit put in their place; for "*I am* the way."

Still more emphatically is the same idea enunciated when Christ, having proclaimed Himself as being not only the way, but the truth besides, goes on to make a yet more explicit proclamation of Himself as the life. This is, in fact, a literal statement—which cannot, save by a quite unwarrantable explaining of it away, be taken to mean any but one thing—of the doctrine that Christ actually brings the Father's life to man. "I



am the life,"—then the true surrender of our natures to Christ's involves for us the receiving of God's own life, the transforming of our inner natures into divineness. Christ asserting Himself as the life—can it mean that He takes care of the surrendered ones in the meantime, so that at last they may be introduced to a life essentially different from and greater than any life to which He can introduce them now? That does not tell the half. Because He is the life, He can give here and now whatever through all the eternities God Himself can give. As the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself—Christ's announcement is but that same statement in another form; and the Christ who is the life can, out of the fulness of life which the Father has bestowed, perform upon truly surrendered souls the re-creative miracle which will make them children of the Father, partakers of His nature, in deed and in truth. Whatever of perfected being immortality can bring us, He has now to offer: whatever God can give us out of Himself while eternity passes on, Christ can

out of Himself, because He is the life, give us now. He wanted to be taken, not as the first disciples were so apt to take Him, and as later disciples are so apt to take Him still, as the One who helps men over the preliminary difficulties and gets rid of the disturbing conditions, smoothing for them a path over which they may travel in tranquillity, certain that life waits for them at the end,—but as One who already transforms the currents of life in man into divineness, who colours man's character with God's. For His claim to be the life shuts all lesser interpretations of His ministry away.

Or, when Christ associates with His declaration that He came in order that men may have life and may have it abundantly—when He associates with that an emphatic statement that He is Himself the door into the fold where life is found, the same idea emerges. It strikes with all the greater force, indeed, when one notices (what is seldom, if ever, noticed) that Christ has just previously employed that same figure of the door in another way, and has spoken of Himself as the Shep-

herd who enters in to the sheep by the door, in contrast to the thief who climbs in some other way. In that first usage of the figure, in speaking of Himself as entering by the door, Christ indicates, we may say, the naturalness of His appeal to the nature of man—indicates that man, if he knows himself and his need, must recognise how the ministry of Christ comes to him as the one thing for which he has waited and longed—how the Christ, as He draws near, has all appropriateness in His coming. But then, it is as though Christ's mind flashed on to the thought, "There is another possible usage of this same figure—and a usage of it which will convey with literal exactness the relationship between Myself and man." And so He goes on to declare that He Himself *is* the door, and that by Him if any man enter in he shall be saved, and go in and out and find pasture. It is the emphatic assertion of personality once more. It is Christ's statement—to the same purpose and end as His statement that He is the Way and the Life—Christ's statement that in actual abandonment to His life and His nature

is found the abundant fulness for our life and our nature : it is His setting of Himself before man, open-hearted, open-natured, inviting him, "Come and be lost in Me, for in Me life is found" : it is His declaration that He does not merely point man to the life, but bids man find it in Himself. Christ comes by the door—but then He Himself *becomes* the door. The actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ is the secret of life. If He be the door, nothing less will suffice to grasp the fulness of what He has to bestow ; and by this declaration, as by many others, Christ pronounces a verdict of inadequacy upon many of the Christward attitudes with which even earnest disciples rest content. It is not enough to attach our life in a manner to the life of Christ as the history records it, finding our life enlarged by the enlarging spirit we can derive from the story of long ago : even in such a relationship inspiration cannot fail to be found ; but it is to the true relationship "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine." It is not enough to pass to a somewhat closer intimacy, and,

conscious that to-day Christ is livingly near us, to set ourselves under His help and encouragement to enlarge and enrich our souls, to realise for ourselves the high ideals He sets before our eyes. Since He is the door, we must make a real entrance would we know the life He offers. The abundant life that is in Him will not be ours in all its abundance until our nature, our heart and soul, all we are,—beholding how He opens to us His nature, His heart, His soul, as the door within which ours is to pass,—escapes unto Him, and losing itself there finds itself again, and finds itself baptized with the life that dwells in Him. The actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ alone answers to Christ's own conception of the relation He would sustain to man; and His thought of Himself and His ministry was always this—that He had life in Himself, life which was one with God's, life with which man's life must be made one. And once again we may say that, since Christ thought of Himself thus, it is as the Life-giver that He must on man's part be thought of and received.

## IV

To enter into the wider questions and arguments connected with this view of Christ's person and work—to construct anything like a detailed and reasoned defence, on strictly philosophic grounds, of the doctrine of the divineness of Christ—is beyond our scope: as was said at the beginning, it is an explanatory, not an apologetic, purpose that this book has in view. One may be permitted to say, however, that the abstract reasonableness of such a descent of the divine life to meet the ascending moral and spiritual evolution of man commends itself at once to the mind. If the end of the evolutionary process, so far as it has been worked up to in man, is to be turned back to, and to be once more connected with, the Source and the Beginning out of which it came, it is in the natural line of things that the Source, which is God Himself, should step down, as it were, to complete the final junction which man has failed to complete. Once a theistic view of



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the universe as a whole is reached a descent of God to the world where man, in his arrested development, stands waiting, is the most strictly philosophic doctrine that can be conceived. God, having in His first creative acts sent forth the process of things in order that it might work its way round to Him again, and might reach Him at last in the ascent of man's nature to His own, takes hold now upon the returning process of things, when it fails to complete the circle or to lift itself across the last gap, and Himself brings it home, finishing thus the circle which He began. The idea involves no contradiction of thought: it shows, rather, how the original Thought, whence all things came, has found a way to fulfil itself, spite of all the spiritual incapacities and lameness of man. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the more one concentrates the mind upon the question, the more surprised one comes to be that any one who seeks to take a complete and rounded view of things should stumble at acceptance of the divineness of Christ, or hesitate as to its reasonableness and its truth. It is pre-



cisely by such a divine Christ that the halting scheme of things, if it may be so put, is helped on to its goal. If man came from God, and can only find himself completed in God again, and if God waits for him to return, what can be more natural—one may dare to use even that strong phrase—than that the waiting God should send Himself down, so to say, to meet and take hold upon ascending man, so that man's ascent to God might be healed of its slowness and its pain, and that the last steps of it, impossible otherwise, might be made possible so? Exceptional, of course, it may and must be: it is in its very nature a thing that could happen but once; but unnatural it is not. It is just the one thing needed to fill the last gap—God bringing Himself to the level of man as man seeks to raise himself to the level of God, till with the meeting of the two all is finished for evermore. And if Christ were a man and no more, then, although for Himself He may have reached further across the spaces than the rest, and arrived nearer to the Father than we, still for all others the distance between them and

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the Father yawns wide and impassable as before, and the task they must endeavour and fulfil ere they can get home has by Christ's coming been essentially changed or diminished not a whit. But if God was actually in Him, then the last gap is filled ; and God, who started human life that it might come back to Him, has Himself started to meet human life as it returned, lest it should tire and fail before its course was done ; and it is possible now for man to give himself to God because God has given Himself to man. The circle is closed up. Man, coming from God, in Christ finds God, and is found by God, again. The doctrine shapes all things into a complete and rounded whole.

The antecedent reasonableness of the conception is, indeed, about as far as pure reason can take us in this matter. As has been said, exceptional such an event as an incarnation must of necessity be : it is in its very nature a thing that could happen but once. It belongs, therefore, to the fundamental idea of such an appearance of divine

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life upon human levels that no evidence *outside of itself* can be adduced to attest it—save, of course, as the effects it brings about drive one, by a process of logical exhaustion, to conviction of its claim. It cannot be witnessed to by any similarities it shows to other things in human experience and in the history of the world; for, by the hypothesis, no such similarities exist. To point to any such similarities would be to destroy the very doctrine on whose behalf their testimony is called. Antecedent reasonableness we may show to be there: beyond that, no evidence except that which the alleged divine life provides by its own energising, its own words and works, in past and present, can be hoped for, or indeed desired. We test and prove other forces that act upon us by the analogies between their effects and previous effects produced by the same force, in our own experience or in that of others—that is, the force we find in one place is compared with a force we know to exist or to have existed in another place, and is identified and classified accordingly. Something happens—and this

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is electricity, or this is heat, we say ; for this that has happened is what heat or electricity always brings about. It is in the nature of things impossible to take the same method with the action of a divine life—supposing such a divine life to have ever come into operation among the forces of our world : the doctrine is not that Christ is one manifestation among many of a force which may be found working in many places and through many channels, but that He is Himself *the* force, separate and unique. He is not a new revelation of an old force which men have felt before. He is a new force before unknown. To ask for such evidence of His divine nature as might be discovered by a reference to other chapters of human experience is really a contradiction in terms ; and such evidence could but defeat its own end. To prove Christ's divineness by showing any relation between Him and other divinenesses would actually leave Him divine, in the sense claimed, no more. Exceptional He may and must remain : we cannot hope to identify the divineness in Him by any marks we have seen elsewhere.

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And the defender of the self-communicating divineness of Christ cannot hope or wish to do more than make clear the antecedent reasonableness of such an incarnation of God as Christ is declared to be and to bring—and then to say to those who are willing to test the self-communicating divineness in Him for themselves, “Remember that it is the uniqueness, not the familiarity, of Christ and of what He does in you that will prove Him to be the giver of God’s life to man.”

## V

On the view of Christ’s personality and work here maintained, the universality and permanence of His power with men finds a quick and ready defence. If He be in truth the Life-giver, the self-communicating Divine Life, the Life-force which gives life wherever and whenever a true contact with it is set up, His mission can never be exhausted nor the last hour of His efficacy be reached, and

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there can be none among all mankind for whom He cannot avail. How are we going to vindicate Christ's claim to perpetual spiritual supremacy? How can we be sure that He was not for an age, but for all time? If, as the world goes forward, and the conditions of human experience are changed, men have in other matters to turn to different sources of enrichment from those which satisfied them once, why should it not be so in spiritual matters too? If our programme has in some things to be altered to meet altered circumstances, and that which avails for one hour or for one type of character has no power in a later hour or for another type of character, how can it be declared that Christ keeps His sufficiency for any and every soul?

To speak of Christ as the Life-giver, as the actual life-force, gives the reply. The soul's relation with Christ is the soul's submission to a living force, and has therefore the same promise for every one and for every age; for, while other things may succeed with one man and fail with a second, or succeed in



one period and fail in the next, a force acts on one and all alike. Take any of the great active forces of the world, and see if the type of man that submits himself to them makes any difference to their working. Light, as it streams from the sun, has, one may put it, the same success upon all: unless, of course, a man be blind, and so far unable to submit himself to the light-force, it matters not what he is; and be he clever or dull, young or old, rich or poor, black or white, the effect on each is the same: the sort of man upon whom the light shines forth counts for nothing here. Here is one of the forces of the universe; and relationship with it ends in the same result for all. So with the fire's heat. The sort of man that puts his hand into the fire matters not: temperament, constitution, circumstance make no difference: the heat-force tells on all alike. It is otherwise when it is a matter of *making* or *doing* things. Then the kind of man that attempts to make or to do has to be reckoned with, the tools he has at his command, the strength he can put into



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his task, and all the other elements that might modify the result. But a force offers the same prospect, as it were, to all.

Christ is Himself the Life—the divine Life-force, and therefore succeeds equally, and must succeed equally, with rich and poor, ancient and modern, old and young. If Christianity were merely the pursuit of an ideal, then its significance for one age might be larger than for another, and some characters might find in it a closer adaptation and attractiveness than the rest. If Christ had been One who merely brought new revelations, set up new conceptions of human life and illustrated them in all their beauty, so that men might have a pattern by which to regulate the life they live, then the world might have ground for saying that perhaps this was after all not he that should come, and that it looks still for the advent of another. But Christ, the divine Life-force which communicates life in its richness to those who permit it to touch them—when we think of

Him so, we know straightway that through all the changeful years and to all the many-patterned souls of men He must be the same. As light comes forth from the sun and heat from the flame upon all that come within their range, let them be what they may, so from the Christ comes forth life, and whoso comes within range of Him receives. What men are, to what period of the earth's history they belong, how their circumstances are arranged, what are the special particulars which they would have to enter in any description of themselves—all cannot count. A living, active force treats all in the same manner and to the same end; and since this Christ is the Life-force of the world, before Him there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but He must be to all men and to all time the same.

Moreover, the spiritual possibilities that lie in a relationship with Christ grow immeasurably greater when Christ is thus conceived as the self-communicating Life-force. For

being Himself possessor of the life of God, He must transform into divineness every life He enfolds: being Himself the Son, He will give to all who make right adjustment of themselves to Him the power to become sons. Life, gripping life, transforms into its own likeness the life it grips. That is known even in common human experience. A personality which obtains a commanding influence over another personality moulds its subject personality to its own shape. What result save this can follow from the commanding mastery over our nature of the nature of Christ—the refining of the unrefined in us, and the purifying of the sinful, till we are in the actual make of us fit members of that family of God whereof Christ Himself is Head? It is not in presence of Christ that human nature, abject as may be its failure, need despair of itself. Just because Christ is what He is, may man, how low soever he be fallen, have hope of perfecting. Were Christ less than He is, the greatness of His message might but deepen human gloom. Prophets

suggest, and by their very suggestion may make man's burden heavier: their revelation demands power in those to whom it is addressed if aught of good is to flow from the revelation they give: they tell us what fair flowers we ought to rear, but do not sow the seed, and leave us weeping that our soul's garden is so bare. This revelation, which comes in Christ, is suggestion and power in one: this revelation is the telling about the fair flowers and the casting into us of the seed whence they will spring forth: this revelation asks from us no strength—asks rather that we be strengthless, and only submit to this strong life which is strong enough and inexhaustible enough to pour itself into our emptiness for evermore. The revelation of the divine life, as Christ offers it, is a living force able to sweep away in its overwhelming rush all baser forces which within us have had their home, leaving no trace of them to spoil the new beauty it brings in. Great and high man's spiritual hopes may rise, since the Life-giver has come.

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The other side of the same idea is, of course, this—that just as through the life-giving Christ hope of spiritual perfecting dawns for all, so apart from the life-giving Christ there is spiritual perfecting for none. If Christ be, indeed, as our thought has taken Him to be, the God in whom we would rest coming down to take us into God by taking us into Himself, it lies in the very nature of His mission that only through that, and through our yielding to it, can rest in God be won. If God be in Him, how can God be met by any one who passes Him by? If the fulness of the divine life be His, how can any soul be baptized with the fulness of the divine life if it turn aside from union with Him? They raise the question sometimes, Is it not possible to live a life of worthiness without surrender to Christ? A vain and foolish question, indeed! Of course, it is possible, in measure; and the worthiness of an unsundered life may be true enough, so far as it goes—but that, after all, is nothing to the point. If life's ideal be this—the life of the Father in us; and if the life of the Father be offering itself to us

in the Christ ; how can any life be lifted to life's ideal except through union with Him ? Outside of Him, this and that may be gained for the adorning and exalting of life, and by all we gain outside of Him life may be exalted and adorned indeed ; but outside of Him the best of all remains unknown, since within Him the best of all is locked. We may do and be many things, and many worthy things, apart from Christ : of the life of God, apart from Him, we cannot partake. For in Him the life of God has come to us.

So, once again, it is as Life-giver that the Christ must be understood and received. He wants to take man's whole life into Himself in order that God in Him may take man and hold him fast. And the exercise required of the human soul is this—to realise that only by the constant derivation of its life from God can its life be what it should, and then to say, " But Thou, the Father whose son I would be, art so far away that I cannot come, hidden in such secret places that I cannot hide myself in Thee. And so I come to this Christ of Thine, in whom Thou dost come

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to me—hide myself in this Christ of Thine, in whom Thou art hidden; and thus all is done, and, living in Him, I live in Thee and Thou in me, all being perfected into one.”





## VII

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THE question before us—our study having reached its present point—may now be formulated thus—How may man obtain for his own the life that is in Christ? What must be man's Christward attitude in order that Christ's life-giving power may take effect? Man needs to possess within himself a response of moral qualities to moral qualities in God; and this necessitates the communication of God's own life to man through the exercise of an actual Fatherhood; and God, stooping from His distance, has set the life which is in Him into Christ His Son, so that man, who could not reach up to the divine life, may find the divine life reaching down to him and offering itself to him on the levels

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he cannot leave—so far the process of thought has led us. How, then, may man take life from Christ? How is the benefit of Christ, so to put it, to be secured?

Faith in Christ is the standard word employed by religion to describe the mood and attitude which man needs to cultivate in order that Christ and Christ's grace and Christ's life may be rightly received; and the one message which religion declares will never be superseded, the one proclamation in which religion holds all things needful to be summed up, is this—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." What, then, is belief or faith?

### I

A true definition of faith has been implied, if not expressed, in all that has been already said concerning Christ as the Life-giver: it is impossible, indeed, to speak of what Christ is, or of what He wants to be, to man, without touching also upon what man is, or upon what

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he ought to be, to Christ, for man's faith-relation to Christ is but the obverse of Christ's life-bestowing relation to man ; and when it was said that "the actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ is the secret of life," perhaps there was given as good an explanation of the essence of faith as we can hope to find. A life given in one personality can only be received into another personality through the real surrender of the personality which is to receive into the personality that is to give ; and faith in the life-giving Christ, therefore, must be more than an intellectual assent to certain alleged facts and doctrines concerning Christ and His work, more than a reliance upon the efficacy of any ministries which He may have performed or be performing on man's behalf (though these things must of course be present, laid down as the first stepping-stones over which faith passes to its goal) : faith must be the *actual movement of man's whole personality to identify itself with, and to lose itself in, the personality of Christ.*

In any case where there is a giving of

anything inward and temperamental, of any quality of character or mind—and such a giving is a quite possible and even familiar thing within the limits of our ordinary human experience—the giving can be performed only through the surrender of him who is to receive to him who gives: the inferior personality must identify itself, at least in that range and department of it that is to be enriched, with the superior; and no mere intellectual conviction that the superior personality *is* superior, no mere expectancy—nothing, in short, except the real moving up of the lower personality into the higher—will secure the boon. Of course, the giving of external and tangible treasure need involve no such intimacy of relation: things which are sufficiently material to be held out in the giver's hands require nothing more than the stretching out of the hand on the part of the receiver; but to give qualities of character or endowments of mind is a totally different matter. Yet we know that such a thing may be. How are these gifts bestowed and accepted? By the power of a dominant

personality, which has absorbed into itself the personality to which the gifts are to be given—that is the only possible reply. How are any qualities of mind or heart or character transmitted from those who have them in their richness to those less generously dowered? By the surrender of the poor personality to the rich—by the mind or heart or character that lacks abandoning itself to, sinking itself in, the mind or heart or character that possesses. Nothing is weighed or measured out: there is no transference of aught that the eye can see or the hand can handle; but who doubts that heart can give to heart, or mind to mind? Qualities of mind and heart and character are given—in most absolute truth and reality *given*—from the rich life to the poor, when the poor mind and heart and character, having little or nothing, subjects itself to the rich mind and heart and character which has all.

Between Christ and man it is a question of giving and receiving life—not one of several qualities merely, but *life*, the sum of all qualities. It is therefore the whole person-

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ality in man that must be submitted to the whole personality in Christ. It was said above that between man and man the inferior personality must identify itself with the superior—at least in that range and department of it that is to be enriched. Between man and Christ no qualifying and limiting phrase finds place; for it is *life* that is now to be given and received—not one or several qualities merely, but the sum of all; and the faith which secures what Christ has to give must be, let it be said once more, *the actual movement of man's whole personality to identify itself with, and to lose itself in, the personality of Christ.* The analogies of human experience alluded to above—the analogies supplied by the relations between one human character and another—cover but a small fraction of the ground. And yet we have but to extend the principle which some of our human relationships suggest to get something like a measure of the Christward faith required from man, if Christ is to be to man the Life-giver indeed. Perhaps the nearest analogy—remote as even the nearest must be



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confessed to be—to the relation of human life with the life Christ brings is found when we relate ourselves to someone whose spirit educates and elevates ours, whose life, through its subtle influences, goes far to re-create ours. We possess friends sometimes—and when we have them their friendship is one of the most sacred blessings of earth—who, even without avowedly teaching us anything, make us wiser ; who, without obtruding detailed counsel upon us, make us strong ; who, simply by the life in them, grip the life in us and impart to us something of what is in themselves. And, on our side, we obtain the benefits of their friendship, not by offering them service, not by a hundred fevered methods of winning from them what they have to give, but simply by abandoning our natures to the play of theirs. We set ourselves *in* them, and so possess them *in* us ; and, so far as it is in their power to do so, they make us live. So, between man and Christ, the effort of the soul—the faith-exercise to which the soul is called—is not to give anything to Christ, or to do anything toward Christ in order that the

divine life in Him may become its possession, but simply to receive the divine life from Him—only, in order to receive the divine life from Him, it must give itself. It must be *in* Him, so that He may be *in* it (and such phrases, it may be said, are numerous beyond counting upon the Scripture page), and that thus it may possess its life in and through Him. Since it is life, a thing which covers the whole nature, that man seeks for from Him, the whole nature must be abandoned to His spell and sway, and the life in Him must be allowed to live and have its way in us. Thus do we believe with a belief, a faith, that makes Christ our own. When we sound the meanings of that apostolic phrase we noticed before—“*in* Him ye are made full,” when we realise how the whole nature can abandon itself to the sway and spell of the Christ-nature, and when we compel it to abandon itself so (and it is a thing we never make any difficulty about in those times of sweet and ennobling friendship of which we have just spoken), when we let Christ cast all His influences around us and through us,

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re-creative and transforming as all His influences are, then, since the life in Him is divine, will the life He produces in us be divine as His own, and faith will do its perfect work. We are to be *in* Him ; and to set us in Him is the true activity of a true faith ; and we believe, with a belief worthy the name, when we see to it that there is the actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ Himself.

## II

But is not this a theory of belief constructed with a particular purpose in view—a piece of special pleading, in fact ? In our ordinary usage do we attach to belief or faith any such significance as is here suggested ? Is there anything more than mere intellectual assent contained in the idea of faith as we commonly understand it ? In thus making faith, in the realm of religion, stand for a movement of the entire personality, are we not reading into the conception of faith some-

thing for whose admission no valid claim can be made out ?

A brief glance at the essential idea of belief may serve to answer the question and to dispel the suggested doubt. We may find that, even in our common usage, faith or belief may imply something more than an intellectual adherence to stated propositions—*and that whether, in any particular case, it does so or not depends upon the object of our professed belief.* What, in the last analysis, is believing? Surely it is permitting the thing which we claim to believe to work itself out fully upon us, express itself and all its consequences in us, reach into us and affect us to whatever extent it will. We come near to the heart of the matter when we say that it is not so much we that take grip upon the things we believe as it is the things we believe that take grip upon us: they stand there, reaching out over us implications and consequences which touch now upon this part of our nature and now upon that; and to believe is to acquiesce, not only in a portion, but in all, of their claims. If by any truth

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whereto I profess to give assent, appeal is made to the mind alone, I believe in it simply by the mind's acknowledgment : if any truth extend its appeal beyond the mind, and has consequences which reach out upon conduct, I believe in it, not by the mind's acknowledgment alone, but by submission of conduct to the appeal it makes : if any truth makes a still larger appeal, goes past the mind and past the outward conduct, and has consequences for the deepest spirit and character in me, I believe in it, not by bidding the mind say "yes," nor by conforming outward conduct to its suggestion, but by letting the spirit and character it implies be born within. A truth takes hold upon us—seizing in some cases upon the intellect alone, in some cases upon intellect and action, in some cases upon intellect and action and character—and to believe it is to let it work itself out upon us and within us as it will.

In many cases, of course—possibly, indeed, in the majority—a mere intellectual assent may be all that is involved in faith ; but whenever this is so, it is simply because the

truth which is for the moment in question has no consequences for any part of us other than the mind. How some truths go deeper than others in their attempt to grip us, it is easy to understand. I believe, for instance, that the sun rises in the east. The mind alone does that truth seek to grasp, and when the mind has assented, my faith in the truth is complete: it makes no appeal to conduct or to character, implies nothing for these spheres, stops short before it enters upon these depths. I believe it simply by saying "yes." But then I believe, also, that I ought to deal honestly with my fellow-men. That goes a little deeper: it takes a grip upon conduct as well as upon the mind; and I believe in it with a complete belief only if I allow my conduct, as well as my mind, to be gripped; and my belief in it is but fragmentary and stunted if, while my mind allows itself to be persuaded, my conduct does not yield. Going further still, I believe that I ought to love virtue rather than vice—not alone to practise it, but to love it. That goes deeper still: it reaches out to the essential spirit and



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character in me ; and I believe it only as mind assents and conduct conforms and character changes ; and my belief is but half-belief, or less, if at either of the earlier stages submission is cut short. We believe a truth or in a truth when we permit it to stretch itself unhindered into whatever furthest depths of our nature it wants to rule.

The moment we pass to truths of the spiritual order, therefore, faith must be a larger thing than it has elsewhere been, must include a larger response, must leap from larger spheres of personality—simply because truths of the spiritual order are themselves larger than other truths have been, and involve larger implications and consequences from which those who profess belief in them cannot, without stultifying themselves, escape. For all spiritual truths grip, not one part of our nature alone, but every part, reach with their many hands into every corner of us, and have consequences for all that enters into the make of us ; and belief in them loses its genuineness if we cut off from their grip any one element of our life. It is impossible



to say one single thing about God or Christ or salvation which, if there be anything in it at all, does not imply something for the profoundest depths of personality in us as well as for the mind: truths about God and Christ and salvation make their first appeal, of course—like all other truths—for the mind's acceptance, but follow that up with a deeper-reaching appeal: down upon the heart, upon the very material of character, they press with their desire to take control; and there is no belief in them if, while the mind assents, heart and character refuse. Belief in truths of the spiritual order involves a submission of the whole personality to the truths in which a profession of belief is made.

It is not difficult to run over one or two of the articles common to, at any rate, the majority of religious creeds, and to see how they justify what has here been said. I believe in God. God—but the moment we begin to give the full value to the word, to let its implications and its consequences emerge into the light, we see how the truth concerns itself, not with a small section of our living, but with all.

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A God from whom my life took its rise, to whom my life is to be trained back, who has connected Himself by the subtle bonds of spiritual kinship with me, and who looks for me to preserve and develop the bonds He has formed—this truth about God (if these be its implications), this truth about God, to which the mind can fling out its assent so lightly, begins to wind itself round all the deep fibres in me, to clutch at this and that and all, to assert itself, not only in mind, but further and further down. It is not really believed if its assertion of itself down there be checked. I believe in the supremacy and the necessity of goodness. But, giving the full value to the word, we begin to see how it has consequences, not only for outward conduct, but for the inner spirit too. Goodness, which is not only an external obedience to law, but the very substance out of which the self is made—this truth about goodness (if that be what it means) begins to search and probe and assert itself in the mysterious secrecies of my nature where I have myself scarcely dared to look! We have no true

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belief in it if we stop its advance before it gets down there. I believe (coming to one of the most fundamental articles of the evangelical faith) that Christ gave Himself for me. But, giving the full value to the words, it becomes at once apparent that a mere saying "yes" to the truth will be an inadequate response to the appeal it makes. Christ the sinless, somehow setting Himself in the place of me, the sinful, in order that I might somehow be redeemed out of my sinfulness and its penalty up and up towards, even though I cannot fully reach, His sinlessness and its joy—somehow coming to my level that I might be exalted to His—that means transformation through and through me! That truth has an appeal to, a grip upon, every single faculty and every new-born thought and every successive action of mine: not one of these can be what it was if this truth and its consequences hold me as they ought. This truth that Christ gave Himself for me—how (if all this be contained within its meanings) it goes down and down, till all I am has been asked, and has given its

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reply, whether to the grip of this truth it will yield itself up! And so with all other truths of the religious and spiritual realm. Not one single thing can be said about God or Christ or salvation which, when we allow the truth to make its full appeal, does not direct an appealing look and stretch an arresting hand towards all we are; and until all we are responds, faith in truths about God and Christ and salvation is not there, whatever pale shadow of it (mistaken perhaps for the substance) there may be. Belief in truths of the spiritual order involves a movement of the whole personality into the truths professedly believed.

This is really to say that, in regard to faith in a life-giving personality, we find ourselves at the same point as before. The truth that Christ is the one life-force for men requires, if it be indeed believed, a movement of the whole personality toward it, and a submission of the whole personality to all that it implies; and since the truth points beyond itself to the life-force with which its affirmation is concerned, faith in the truth requires

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a movement of the whole personality toward and into Christ Himself. Our conception of faith in Christ—Christ being what He is—does but apply to the case in hand the same principle on which even the ordinary conception of faith is built up. We come back to our first definition again, and say that the faith which secures what Christ has to give must be the actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ Himself, the actual movement of man's whole personality to identify itself with, and to lose itself in, the personality of Christ. To formulate the definition thus is but to accept—as an accurate theory of faith demands—the implications wrapped up in the statement that the Christ is the life of men.

### III

If, changing our point of view, and approaching the matter from another direction, we inquire, What was the idea of faith in Christ held by Christ Himself? the previous

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conclusions are yet more fully confirmed. When Christ spoke, as He so frequently did, of believing in Him, insisting on that belief as the one necessary condition for the obtaining of whatever benefits He had to give, what did He mean? As soon as we recall the fact that He employed other words, as well as the words "faith" or "belief," to describe the relationship which the disciple was to sustain towards Him, the answer begins to become clear; for a significance must be found which will cover all the expressions used; and our interpretation of faith must be extended to match the interpretations naturally attached to the other utterances in which Christ spoke of the one needed thing. It is quite true that religious exhortation follows the example of Christ Himself in taking "belief in Christ" as its standard expression; and yet Christ, while in His own usage expressions kindred with this held the most prominent place, nevertheless did employ more methods than one of declaring what man must do in order to receive the life and salvation He had brought.



“Come unto me”—that was one utterance in which Christ embodied the programme of those who hoped to obtain His gifts. “Receiving Him” was another phrase He employed not seldom. More remarkable still, once at least He declared, as He likened Himself to the bread by which the body nourished its health and strength, that He was the bread of the soul’s life, and said, “He that eateth Me, he also shall live because of Me.” These and other phrases we find dropped upon almost every page of the Four Gospels, showing how Christ, when He sought to tell what man must do in order that it might be well with him, spoke of faith indeed, but expounded the matter in other ways as well.

When He spoke of faith or belief, therefore, He must have meant the same thing as when these other phrases rose to His lips; and, as has been said, we must find for faith some meaning which is in harmony with the meaning of these other phrases before we can be sure that we understand faith as Christ Himself understood it. By believing in Him He cannot have meant anything else—cer-



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tainly He cannot have meant anything less—than He meant by the rest of the terms He used to describe the soul's right relationship with Him. Any understanding of faith which does not correspond with the significance of all the other expressions Christ was constantly bringing into use is, by that very lack of harmony with them, at once condemned.

Mere belief in what Christ has said does not answer to the test. We believe in a manner when we adopt as our own a statement, a piece of information, which someone else imparts. But we have only to set that idea side by side with the great ideas to which Christ gave utterance, and we see at once how such a conception of faith is far too paltry to have been Christ's. Receiving Him—coming to Him—partaking of Him—what likeness is there between these conceptions and the conception of merely giving assent to statements Christ puts forth? Faith must be something more than that. We may silence every movement of contradiction or doubt—we may be ready to accept every word Christ utters, though it suggest

mysteries without number—we may hold to all He tells us about Himself and His work, and may not be possessed of one grain of faith, in the essence of it, after all.

A faith which signifies trust in another's character does not answer to the test. We may have faith in what someone is—in his moral integrity and worth. But will that suffice here? Surely not. What similarity is there between such faith as that and the faith suggested by those striking, penetrating phrases Christ employed? To trust in Christ's goodness in that sense would be in no wise the same thing as coming to Him, receiving Him, partaking of Him. Faith in Him must be a fuller thing than that.

Not even faith or belief in the sense of a committal of our interests to one in whom we confide really answers to the test. We have faith when we give up our concerns to someone's care, let another act for us in some crisis of our living, take the judgment and the action of some friend as sufficient. Will that do here? This is the highest flight, the furthest stretch, to which, for many, belief

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in Christ attains. He is somehow to take charge of all man's interests, set right for man whatever has gone wrong, bring about for man results of good which man could not compass. Yet do not those other outstanding utterances of Christ's—coming to Him, receiving Him, partaking of Him—suggest profounder things even than this? If faith bear the same meaning that these great words bear, it must be more even than the trusting of our affairs into the hands of a Christ wiser and stronger than ourselves.

In its highest form, faith is surrender, not of our affairs and our interests, but of ourselves. It is taking, not any smaller gift, but life itself, from the one in whom our faith reposes. Seldom does our common experience provide us with an illustration of faith or belief in this its loftiest exercise; and yet (as has been hinted before) in the companionship of souls wherein one dominates and inspires the other until the inspired one takes all it has and is from the inspirer, in an association which love makes so intimate and close that the very bounds of personality

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are broken down, some faint likeness to it may be discerned—for indeed, in the last analysis faith is but another aspect of love. Faith is surrender, just as love is surrender—surrender till all impulse, all movement, the beginning of every activity, the moulding forces of life, come from one to whom we have surrendered. And as we reach to that understanding of faith we stand upon the level of those other phrases wherein Christ described the soul's needed exercise towards Himself. This, then, must be faith, as Christ would have it understood. "Come unto me"—make your nature come to Mine, move up to Mine till it is surrendered to Mine. "Receive me"—open your nature to Mine till Mine masters yours. "I am the Bread of Life . . . he that eateth Me, he also shall live because of Me"—take Me into the recesses of your life, till as bread is the source of life to the body, I am the Bread of Life to the soul. Surrender is the significance of every utterance; and when Christ spoke of faith, He meant surrender then too. The making of our whole personality subject to His—the

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putting of heart and mind and will into subordination to His until ours shall take movement and character and colour from His—that is the surrendering exercise of faith, and the highest faith we can put forth. Of course, the highest form of faith includes all the lower forms : we must believe what Christ says, and trust in what He is, and commit our interests to His care ; but faith must pass beyond all that and bring about a surrender of the whole nature to Christ's. And it is in harmony with this that when Christ spoke of belief it was nearly always of believing *on* Him or believing *in* Him that He spoke—a method of speech which has become so familiar to us from reading the record of it in the gospel story, that we hardly realise what it implies. To believe somebody is one thing—to believe *in* or *on* somebody is quite another. Believing *in*—it brings with it the idea of the movement of the believer up to and into the one believed : it carries a notion of believing ourselves into the Christ, so that in what He is may be found the source of what we are. Faith unites us—

when it fulfils Christ's own conception of faith—with the Christ in whom the faith is professed. "Believing in"—that is, dependence, abandonment of the self to His self, attaching our life to His. And there may be degrees of faith, if faith be taken thus; and our speech about believing in Christ more is not a meaningless thing. Can one believe more or less? No, we cannot believe more or less, but we can believe *in* more or less, move ourselves more or less completely into the Christ, let Him be constantly or intermittently the source of life to us. Many have believed Christ fully, and yet have believed *in* Him only feebly; and their faith is not, therefore, the faith that corresponds with Christ's own ideal. It was belief *in* or *on* Him for which He always called. As an old preacher<sup>1</sup> of centuries ago quaintly puts it—"No, this believing on Christ implies an union of the soul to Christ, and fiduciary recumbency on Christ." The essence of the thing lies there in the old-fashioned phrase, "Fiduciary recumbency,"—a laying down of

<sup>1</sup> Gurnall, 1617-1679.



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our nature upon the nature of Christ. That is what faith must be: it must settle us in or on Christ. And if the quotation from the old preacher may be followed by a quotation from a preacher of to-day, we may say that George Macdonald is at the heart of the matter—on the track, so to say, which Christ's own words laid down—when he declares, "Any faith in Him, however small, is better than any belief about Him, however great."

If, then, we interpret the word "faith" or "belief" in the light shed upon it by all the other great, ringing, penetrating words of which Christ made use, we do but arrive once more at the conclusion we previously reached. The only fruitful faith must be the faith which sets us *in* Christ, and enables us to say that now it is no more we that live, but Christ that liveth in us. Faith is the actual passing of our nature into the nature of Christ Himself.



## IV

It may be necessary to put in here a word of warning, lest it should be supposed that faith, on the view of it here maintained, is merely the helpless falling upon Christ of a nature which has lost its power—in fact, another name for despair. This movement of the whole personality up to and into the personality of Christ can only be made when the soul holds and keeps a strong grip upon itself, and drives itself with force of will to the Christward attachment which is the secret of life: faith is an actual *exercise* which man must perform, and for the due performance of which he must make a definite call upon his powers; and merely to give up the spiritual problem as being too great for us is not to believe with a belief upon which life will follow. Faith is an earnest and strenuous thing. A collapse of the soul is not a movement into Christ and the Christ life. Significant in this connection is the conjunction of phases which Paul inserts in

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his letter to the Ephesian Christians when he tells them that, thus does his prayer for them run, "That ye may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." In order that they might possess a faith which would suffice to secure the in-dwelling of Christ, they needed to be strong. It is the feeling of weakness that religious speech frequently sets in the forefront as the chief condition of experiencing the blessings of grace: it is when we are most entirely emptied of all power of our own that we think the gifts of Christ are most freely given. And, of course, the idea has a measure of truth: true it is that the deepest secrets of the spiritual life will be withheld for ever from the heart which has not known the sense of helplessness nor been touched with the feeling of its utter inability to become what it would. And yet the primary necessity for those who would know the reality of Christian experience is that they should be strong. The only worthy surrender to the Christ-life is the surrender

which is the outcome of a direct and firm resolution, the expression of the soul's steadfast and immovable will. It is not when man is in a condition of spiritual collapse, when the soul's energies have given way, and the heart has no more power to hope or strength to pray—it is not then that man can best set himself under the influences and ministries of the life-communicating Christ: an unworthy offering must it always be to give ourselves, when all the fibres of our being hang loose and the lax threads of sensibility and emotion cannot be gathered up and all the currents run slow, to give ourselves then to the dominion of One whom we neglected before, and only take now as our last resort; and what is required of the soul is not that it should fall in abject helplessness, when nothing else is left for it to do, upon the providences it has despised, but that it should come with vigour of purpose and firmness of intention to the Giver of life, and say to Him, "I have need of Thee, and am come that Thou mayest be my all. Deliberately and purposefully I sink myself in Thee." At

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the outset of the relation between man and Christ must be, if the relation is to have its perfect result, the submission which is the outcome, not of weakness, but of strength. Our highest spiritual opportunities come to us when we have completest mastery over our own inmost being, for then can we make most complete that identification of ourselves with Christ in which faith consists. Faith is the employment of man's power for the purpose of throwing himself at Christ's feet—not the falling down there when all power has departed and all his energies are dead. The disciple of most steadfast will will be the disciple also of fullest life, if the will be rightly directed and rightly controlled. Strength, not feebleness, gives birth to the truest faith.

It is the paradox of Christian experience, in fact, that they who would possess that experience must first be strong in order that they may afterwards make themselves nothing—must gather up all the energies of their nature under the firm grasp and control of their will, in order that they may afterwards give them up to be part of the new Christ-life

within. One may say, indeed, that this is where the stress and strain of the demand for faith is felt by the ordinary man—for a true faith can only be exerted precisely at the moment when man is, by the constitution of his nature, least disposed to put it forth. To use strength only for the purpose of giving it up to the dominance of another personality than our own—that is one of the hardest tasks for human nature to perform. When we are crushed and broken, when all the inspirations by which we used to live have ceased to come to our call, *then* we can make some fashion of surrender to One who promises to be Restorer and to renew life's faded glories again ; but when there is within us the strength that makes us proud, when the consciousness of a possible achievement we might carry through unaided beats up—it is not so easy to surrender then. But that is the demand. Man is to be strong—yet must remember that he is to use his strength only to secure the in-dwelling of Christ. It is when the soul gathers its energies, possesses elasticity and vigour, draws itself erect—it is then only

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that it can put forth (though it is precisely then that it may find it most difficult to put forth) the faith which identifies it with the life-communicating Christ. At least, let it be remembered that faith is not another name for despair : it is an actual exercise which the soul must perform, and an exercise which the soul will perform the more perfectly in proportion as it is self-mastered and strong.

### V.

From all that has been said concerning the faith-relation between the soul and Christ, it follows that faith has nothing temporary about it, is not something which stands only at the beginning of Christian experience and gives Christian experience its start, but is the permanent and abiding condition of the soul's life. To believe in or on Christ is not an act which in the opening chapter of his spiritual history a man accomplishes once for all, but an act which he has for ever to maintain and to repeat : it is not merely



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the method by which an initial crisis is overpast, but the method by which a true condition of character must find its support to the end; and faith is not only the first push which starts the soul out of lifelessness into life, but the very breath which the soul must ceaselessly give forth if its life is not to die. For the spiritual problem remains ever unchanged. To win the life that is in Christ into itself—to sink itself into the life that is in Christ—that is the constant task by which the soul is faced. And if faith be but another name for such an identification and coalescence of Christ and the soul (and this is what we have found it to be), then the one thing needful, not for an hour but for all time, is to believe. To speak in theological terms, no essential distinction between conversion and sanctification can be maintained: the faith which works the first accomplishes the second too. And the utter dependence upon the life-communicating Christ, in which spiritual experience finds its commencement, is not to be outgrown or discarded, but to become deeper as the years go on.



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In other words, the progress of spiritual experience is simply the confirming of the first close personal relation with the life in Christ. There is no spiritual maturity, in the sense of an attainment of power to take our spiritual interests into our own charge—the conditions of the spiritual problem and its solution (if we have rightly formulated them) forbid. Herein does the soul's relation with Christ differ absolutely from the relations we may sustain to other leaders in other departments of life and experience. You sit at the feet of some recognised master in a certain province of intellectual inquiry, for example. At the first, in the period of your entire ignorance, you have to keep close to him as he leads the way, step by step, across the fields of knowledge, in which you are wholly strange: the advances of your understanding must follow painstakingly in the tracks he marks out; and for any progress at all, you are altogether dependent upon the completeness of the intellectual relation you have established between your mind and his. But little by little the necessity for

such a perfect subserviency passes away : your thought can make its own experiments : your mental powers become sufficiently at home in the hitherto unknown regions to search and discover for themselves ; and while you still acknowledge your indebtedness for early help and inspiration to the teacher who guided you in the first efforts of your pupilage, you now depend upon your own aptitudes and upon what you yourself can do. In the last resort, the conception of faith entertained by much current religious thought amounts to little more than the establishment of a relation between Christ and the soul, which is *preliminary* to the soul's advance in grace. The benefit which faith has taken out of the spoken word and the finished work of Christ, of course remains ; but faith itself is hardly the constant and unchanging source of all the experience the soul goes through. A dividing line is drawn between the primary act through which the soul is saved and the subsequent processes whereby its spiritual development is secured. And the conception of faith needs to be revised in such wise as

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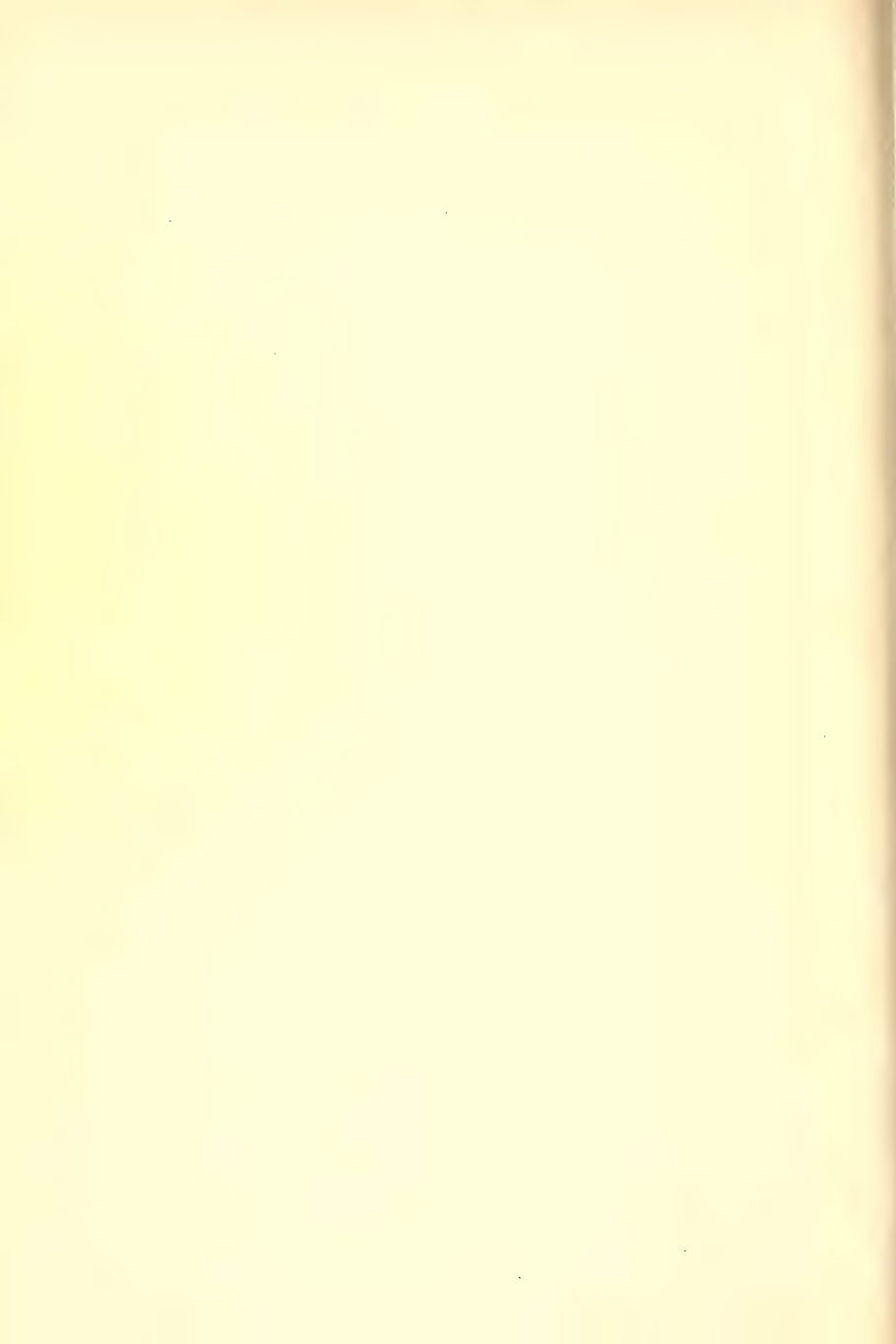
to make it, not only the initial moving power, but the continuously operative sustaining power, of the true life in the soul. There is no spiritual maturity for us in the sense of being delivered from the utter surrender to and dependence upon Christ in which our spiritual life begins: a perfect and unbroken dependence would be the sign of a full-grown soul. In our human relationships we enter into our heritage of power, and stand alone. In our Christ-relationship we do but lose ourselves the more completely, sink ourselves the more deeply, in the life with which Christ enfolds those who believe. If life's secret lies in the oneness of man's life with Christ's—and if faith be the movement of the soul into that life-giving union—then, at the end as at the beginning, faith is the required thing; and the life man lives in the flesh must be not only started from, but maintained by, "the faith of the Son of God."

## VI

The summing-up of the whole matter, then, is this, that the true faith-relation is established between the soul and the life-communicating Christ when faith is taken as the actual passing of man's nature into the nature of Christ, or, conversely, as the actual reception of the nature of Christ into the nature of man. Identification of the believer with Him who is believed is, in brief, the very essence of faith. When Christ is so entirely one with us that we have lost our being in His—when He thinks in our thought, gazes out through our eyes, moves in our activities, is heard in our speech—then alone has faith done its perfect work. Thus does a true belief make the source of life to become actually a part of ourselves: we have not to look outside of ourselves for the Christ in whom the divine life comes down, for He is closer to us than any human companionship can be, yea, He is in our very hearts; and up from the deep wells of life, which through our union with

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Him have sprung within us, do the life-streams for ever flow. Sweet, doubtless, is it to say that I am Christ's—sweeter still to say that Christ is mine; but not even these utterances exhaust the triumphant anthem of faith. Faith, at its highest range, can say that His life and mine are so indissolubly united that they flow together in a mystic, holy blending which no words can adequately represent, that every barrier between us is broken down, so that it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me. The loftiest ideal that belief keeps in view is to possess our Christ, not as companion only, however close and faithful He might prove—not as dearest friend only, however changeless His friendship might be—but to possess Him as soul of our soul, life of our life. A vital belief makes exchange of personalities with Christ. He is to dwell in our hearts through faith.





## VIII

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WHAT place does the view of faith, thus expounded, allow to, or demand for, the idea of Christian self-culture and its necessity—the idea of permanent responsibility, according as that self-culture is neglected or pursued, for the spiritual destiny whereto the believing soul finally attains? Accepting the conception of the faith-relation here contended for, are we ranked among those who consider that in one act the soul settles its fate for ever—or does something hang in the balance still? We need to arrive at some right understanding of that “only believe” which is evangelicalism’s persistent message, lest a mistaken accent or emphasis set upon the “only” should lead us astray: we need

to ascertain whether it is really possible, in one instant of decision, to put ourselves beyond all solicitude as to what shall befall, beyond all fear of spiritual failure, beyond all likelihood of missing what might have been ours. Does there remain, for him who has declared his faith in Christ, anything yet to do in order to make his calling and election sure ?

I

It may be said that, speaking generally, there are two contrasted views of a life which has made a definite exercise of Christ-ward faith—the one taking it as a life whose problem is finally settled, the other taking it as a life started, indeed, on new lines of growth, but capable even yet both of growing and of failing to grow, and capable, therefore, both of reaching and of missing its perfected bliss. On the one view, a genuine entrance into the ranks of Christ's adherents is like taking out a guarantee that whatever the soul can possess and enjoy is bound in the long run

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to be ours, like the making of an agreement, between grace on this side and faith on that, that no point of good shall be withheld from us when the last settlement is reached. On the other view, a genuine entrance into the ranks of Christ's adherents plants the seed of better life and nobler character in the soil of the soul, but brings, with this, a necessity that the growing life and character shall be watched and tended, shielded from the moral weathers that might spoil it, kept beneath all beneficent showers that will nurture it, trained and fed and cherished under the consciousness that, if here is a life which may reach a glorious maturity, here is also a life which may flag and droop, perhaps even die. Salvation is something that we clutch at as Christ holds it out to us in His open hand—so, it is not unfair to say, the one conception of things implies. Salvation is the beginning of a new process *in* us, certain to be worked out to fulness if we allow no alien influence to interrupt, but liable to be stunted and restrained, and it may be even brought to utter stand, if we do not charge

ourselves with our guardian watcher's duty—so, one may put it, is the other conception of things to be expressed. Of course, even on the former view the faith-changed life has to *prove* itself: it ought, by better conduct, by avoidance of much which before was dear, by consecration to much which before was reluctantly or not at all embraced, to show that it is there; and there is shame and blame if the new spirit that is professed do not indicate its presence so. But the relation of the soul to God and to Christ, the soul's eternal destiny, its place among those whom God will gather round Him when all His family comes home—these things have been settled, and in regard to them there can come no change. But the faith-changed, or partially faith-changed, life—so holds the other, truer view—has in a sense still to *make* itself. It may become life abundant, or it may thin down until there is scarce a thread of it left; and it is not settled yet which way it will be. It may so feast upon the bread of heaven, and upon nothing else, that it will push up and up in strong and healthy growth; or it

may allow earth to offer it its poisoned food until health and strength decline; and it is not yet settled which way it will be. According to this conception, there is no salvation apart from a perfect heart; and the heart can complete or limit its salvation as it allows or forbids the true life within it to grow toward perfectness. There is no heaven to be won except the heaven which the life within us makes; and our heaven may be glorious or may lack something to the fulness of its glory as the true life within us guards itself or grows careless, strengthens itself or drops into decay.

In such ways as these may be set forth the distinction between the two contrasted views of the result brought about through entrance into a faith-relation with Christ. Which of the two has in it the greater impulse to moral and spiritual progress is at once apparent; and it may be said that a conception of faith and its effects which in any way reduces faith's moral leverage upon human nature deserves to be immediately counted suspect. Of course, to any one who has felt

the burden of a morally disordered nature, and has despaired of introducing fairness into the chaos within, the thought of making a final and instantaneous settlement of his spiritual fate is one which at first captures and captivates the oppressed heart. It is sweet to think that by one moment's faith I pass into perfect security, and that whatever I may be, and however I may regret what I am, I need trouble myself about the ultimate outcome of things no more. And yet, if conscience does allow itself to be silenced for a moment so, it will, if we listen a little longer, protest against the very means by which it has been stilled. For with the acceptance of such an idea we practically drop out of the progressive moral ranks of men: at any rate, it is not in the original and essential faith which religion requires that the moral impulse resides: others may press on, while we, actually through our comfortable belief that for us all is fixed, are tempted to lag behind; and any religion based on such a view is a source, not of high moral inspiration, but of moral confusion.



It is an undoubted fact that Christianity has sometimes become an enfeebling and character-belittling thing ; that some sincerely religious people have possessed a standard of life which an ordinary upright man of the world would scorn ; that some of the meanest types of character the world has seen have been found in religious circles and within the Church's walls. It is not that there are any forces in this universe that can compare with the Christian forces in the production of noble character and worthy living, when the Christian forces are properly understood and used. But if it be held that the initial establishment of a faith-relation with Christ settles all questions for ever, leaving nothing in the balance any more, what can be looked for but that moral aspiration should become enfeebled and moral ardour give out ? However a saving of these things may be attempted—however it may be sought to keep them as important accessories of the faith-saved life—there is no real place for them, in their regnancy, any more. Moral greatening comes, not through a gospel which tells us that all is done, but



through a gospel which bids us still watch and pray.

## II

In the view of faith and its function, which has in these pages been maintained, no danger of diminished moral ardour lurks. In fact, so soon as the whole stress of religious thought is made to fall upon the conception of *life*—in the sense of the sum-total of the inner moral state—the danger is gone by. It is not in a religious system which centres round the idea of life, which looks on life as the ultimate of religious concern, and which takes faith as the identification of the believer with the life in Christ, that faith can become a substitute for the acceptance of moral responsibility or a drug to the sensibilities of conscience : no single and measurable act of faith (if life be the supreme matter) could be decisive of spiritual issues for all time. It is only when emphasis falls upon something that Christ has wrought *for* us, rather than upon something which the contact of His

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personality is to accomplish *in* us, that faith can be looked on as an utter shifting from our shoulders of the moral burden we carried before. Of course, if it be the all-important business of the soul, not to wed itself to Christ, but to secure a share of the spiritual wealth He has by His life and death amassed and bequeathed, then faith has only, in one effort, to assert and establish its title, and all is well for evermore. But insistence on life as the key-idea—on Christ as the Life-giver—on faith as identification with the life Christ possesses—leaves moral responsibility unimpaired, allows full weight to every warning against slothfulness and careless ease, and makes it still supremely necessary that the believer shall gird on his armour if he is to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

We are to surrender to the life-force in Christ—and therewith all is done. "Only believe" is the formula which the soul may well adopt as regulative and definitive for its spiritual career. And, of course, a perfect and never-broken faith would make all other

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moral exercises superfluous indeed. One act of faith—were it but co-extensive with the believer's earthly term—would solve the problem of destiny. But to preserve a perfect and continuous identification with the Christ-life, so that no other life than Christ's shall find its place within, is an achievement (whatever may be said as to the abstract possibility or impossibility of it) which no one, as a matter of fact, carries through. And meanwhile, the normal process of character-development goes on, calling for ceaseless watchfulness lest anything evil intrude, and taking its part in the making of the life which we shall present for judgment to God at last. In other words, the Christly life-force keeps none of us wholly to itself ; and it is precisely in that fact that the possibility of spiritual danger and spiritual degeneration lies. In the making of us other influences than the Christ-influence take a hand ; and the disciple, real as his faith may be, dare not, just because he has once believed, leave these other influences to work themselves out as they will. It cannot be that they will now be resultless

upon him, or that the results they work on him and in him will not count : he cannot afford to ignore or despise the moral processes which, when faith becomes for a longer or briefer period something less than the regnantly operative power, still run their course. The life which actually constitutes a man is, in most cases, a sort of compromise between the force that comes from Christ and the other forces—making so feebly for good when they make for good at all, making very often for the opposite of good—the other forces which are ever ready, within him and without him, to take him in their charge. At any rate there is a divided empire ; and the disciple has to watch lest the powers which assert themselves when faith gives up the reins, undo in any wise the work which past faith has accomplished, or make it difficult for faith to resume its sovereignty in the future again—always bearing in mind, through all the spiritual vicissitudes of his lot, that an unbroken faith is the ideal spiritual state, and that were an unbroken faith present all watchings and wrestles and agonies would

be over. The coming of that which is perfect would indeed cause that which is in part to be done away. But in the common experience of humanity the perfect thing delays. And when faith relaxes, and the flow of the Christ-life is not sufficient to fill our natures, there are other life-streams quick to seize the moment and to occupy the channels left bare. To prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good, remains, therefore, a counsel from which faith does not subtract one jot of solemn warning, and a counsel which the disciple needs ceaselessly to have echoing in his ear. Scarce a moment can we live, hardly a movement can we make, but from this side or from that, from without or within, some force, some thought, some atmosphere, presses upon or into the moral substance of us, and must, if we let it have its way, leave some result behind. What if in the intervals which the imperfect faith of humanity too often permits, an enemy come and sow tares among the wheat? It must be the disciple's care—if *life* be in truth the ultimate thing in his concern—to guard the life within from whatever might

bend or blemish it, to see to it that the work of one hour of faith be not, in one moment of faith's relaxation, spoilt or undone ; for on the maintenance or the omission of such a careful guardianship the final spiritual issue must in large measure depend ; and it must be possible, if life be the all in all, for even a soul which has not been wholly strange to faith to miss something of its blessedness in the end. Life will be beautiful and strong, or spoilt and feeble, according to our cherishing or our neglect : there is no single act of faith which finally delivers the believer from all danger of finding the life in him with its vigour impaired and its loveliness clouded at the last. How degrees of joy are regulated and ordered in the final scheme of things is necessarily a secret which lies beyond our search ; but it *cannot* be the same for those who have in carelessness admitted every influence that knocked at the door as for those who have kept watch. The fact that the whole Christian system centres upon the idea of *life* forbids it. And it is with that solemn consciousness upon him that the believer



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must take the problem of Christian self-culture into his thought—striving for the perfect faith which shall carry him beyond the watching and the anxious guard whereby faith's deficiency is so imperfectly compensated, but resolute, in the meantime, to seek not yet repose, and to cast all dreams of ease away.

### III

The Christian disciple, indeed, needs a very definite conviction that, in regard to the changeless laws of character, Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil,—that for him, as for all others, the decree still stands firm, that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”—that there is no room for any lax feeling that moral issues matter less than they did before. To take Christ as the Life-source does not mean that we pass out of the keeping of those enactments concerning the effect of mistake and wrong upon the erring ones which have from the beginning been ordained: it is, in fact, one of the strangest



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perversions this earth has ever seen, that He who came to restore goodness to its lost throne in the hearts of men, and whose essential work is only in such a restoration performed, should be looked on as making it possible for man, with aught of impunity, to forget or slight its claim. Not by one jot or tittle does the law of responsibility for what we are abate its stern grip upon us, enrolled though we be among those who exercise a Christ-ward faith : we suffer in the well-being of our spirits for the mistakes we make, we must take the consequences of moral judgment that has gone astray, and must be the worse for our deviations from the highest, and must reap due harvests from all the seed we sow. Even more strongly, indeed, may the truth be put ; and it may be said that a recognition of Christ as the Life-force makes man's responsibility for what he is really a greater thing. If it be true that with the coming of Christ there comes a new life-power, able to master, for those who rightly adjust themselves to it, all things, in circumstance, in the world outside, in the heart within, which mastered them before,

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then there is for the disciple not less, but more cause for shame if he be mastered still. The very wonder of what Christ is does but emphasise the responsibility resting upon those who claim to have exercised a genuine faith. It is the word of grace that Christ came to save His people from their sins; but the disciple, having heard that word, needs to hear the other also—"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin." Again let it be said that, once the emphasis of religious thought is set on *life*, faith leaves responsibility unimpaired. Shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid!

The exercise of faith, therefore, will leave the Christian disciple with an anxious care for all that makes for a right self-discipline, with attention fixed on all high idealisms of conduct, with watchfulness ever maintained upon all moral processes that go on within or seek to work upon him from without,—for by all these things, he knows, will the faith which draws life from Christ (the faith

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which he ought to keep, but can hardly keep, as the sole maker of the life he possesses) have its work helped and confirmed, if his self-guardianship be faithful and true. Only, for the Christian disciple all these things will be but subsidiary and transitory,—subsidiary and transitory in that they are but the preparatives for, the passing alternatives to, that final, utter, permanent, faith-connection between his nature and Christ's, in which full salvation will at last be found. And he will face the thought of the judgment-bar at which in the end he will stand, knowing that there every remnant of sinfulness in him must bear its reproof—yet not despairing or afraid, so long as he can truly say that his experience has made at least some approach to a realisation of the apostolic motto, "To me to live is Christ,"—and sure that, in so far as a real belief has gone out from him to Christ and brought Christ back to him, he will there possess, not in virtue of some legal fiction which the Judge accepts, but in very deed and truth, a righteousness which is not his own, but which is of Christ through faith.



## IX

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THUS far, then, we have traced the essential method to be followed by a religious experience which would truly realise the religious ideal; and some programme has been formulated whereby may be brought about that "response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" which crowns the order of the world and fulfils the life of man. But it has to be added now, that religion demands more than an acceptance of its prescribed methods, more even than a following of them,—demands, in fact, that the following of them shall be the dominant interest and the regulative idea, the central pursuit round which all other pursuits are subordinately grouped,

the master-passion whose obedient servants all other passions and desires shall be. Religion requires that the cultivation of a character wholly made of good shall not only be adopted as one of life's aims, side by side with many more, but that it shall be the one regnant aim for which life is lived. Religion is not content to be a visitor, however honoured, at the court: it is not content even with being one of the chosen circle of favoured intimates that press nearest to the throne: it is the throne itself which alone will satisfy its claim. Care for spiritual interests is to be the very *raison d'être* of life. Religion demands the leadership among the great company of life's concerns, and a veritable autocrat it claims the right to be: all other concerns, initiating no movements of their own,—at any rate, carrying out no movements of their own without first referring them for sanction or prohibition to religion the supreme—must obey its signals and wait upon its will: it is not enough that, *in so far as a man is religious*, he should be sincere in his religious quest and correct in



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the religious method he pursues: religion would be all in all. It demands, in brief, that the heart of man shall be pervaded and suffused by a veritable passion for God.

### I

The demand is based upon the fact—and in that same fact finds its justification—that for every man, whether or no he so deliberately orders it, life is always a thing of one supreme aim. Always is there one object on which a man is bent, which, just because it is the object of devotion, gives tone to the man's life and determines what manner of man he shall be. If religion, therefore, is to be determinative of a man's character, it must be exalted to the supreme place and capture the ardent love—else it will be, not religion, but some other influence, that will be found to have contributed most to the making of the man at last. Religion cannot give the full measure, either of its moral reconstructive impulse or of its joy,

to those who assign it to anything less than the dominant place.

Life, it has just been said, is always a thing of one supreme aim. At best, life is an enthusiastic devotion to some one pursuit : if it is to be conscious of all the richness that may belong to it, and to be thrilled through by all the warm and satisfying emotion whereof it is capable, it must have before it some object which excites its passionate ardour and calls forth all its latent powers and rouses it to stretch itself far as it will go ; but whether or no the thing on which life be bent waken enthusiasm and passion in the heart, it *is* on some one thing that life is always bent. Of course, it may not always seem so. If a man consecrates himself to a great cause, then we can see how in his life one master-idea holds all others down : they to whom some great call is come, and who hear it and obey—they manifestly bow themselves before a mission which is life's Holy of holies to them. But the mass of men and women, whose experience departs hardly at all from the commonplace course—

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is it true of them that there is one aim which possesses them altogether, some supreme object which never releases them and which they never forget? What do the bulk of people strive after, but to do their best to get through life with as little stress and disturbance and pain as circumstances will let them off with? Well, but that is just it. That, then, *is* their master-idea. Not a master-idea, perhaps, which they have ever deliberately set upon their life's throne—certainly not a master-idea fitted to excite any particular enthusiasm in those it masters—but for what it is worth, that *is* their life's central care. In the case of each one there must be some one spirit of which he is essentially made; and the spirit whereof he is made will assume the direction of all his activities, and bend them to its service: every one has his central mood or feeling or thought or love, around which everything he does will be grouped, and by which everything he does will be controlled; and, however variable and sometimes contradictory, to the superficial glance, our courses of action may

appear, it is the one dominant desire in the make of us that through them all is seeking to realise itself and to work itself out. For every one of us, life is always a thing of one supreme aim.

And according to a man's choice of his supreme interest is the make of the man himself finally determined. The statement is so reasonable that it will scarce be disputed. The principle it embodies was, in fact, the principle on which Christ Himself once based an appeal for the supremacy of the spiritual over the material interests of life. "The lamp of the body is the eye : if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." The eye is the thing by which the whole of you shapes its course, so that if the eye be "single"—sound and healthy—the whole of you is rightly led ; while if the eye be diseased, the whole of you goes astray. So, the ruling desire you entertain is the eye by which your whole nature is led ; and if your ruling desire be spiritual, your whole nature follows on spiritual

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lines ; and if your ruling desire be material, your whole nature follows on material lines. Thus may one paraphrase and interpret the above-quoted utterance of Christ. The uppermost ambition it is from which the entire being takes its tone. It is always one thing alone that makes us. Whatever is most cared for is the guide of our moral progress. The country within us is not one in which every inhabitant has equal rights, so that love of one ideal and love of another can dwell together in perfect harmony, neither of them asserting superiority or usurping a larger share of rule. It is rather a kingdom in which some power is sure to be supreme over all the rest, and to make its influence felt all through. More than one *master* there cannot be, let occasional *guests* be numerous as they may ; and the ideal to which our most intense concentration is given will set the tone for our being through and through. We have to concentrate ourselves, therefore, on that from which we would have all our being take its tone.

With these facts in view, religion claims

supremacy, and calls upon the human heart not only to yield God a place, but to be thrilled by a veritable passion for God. If God is to give the tone to our being, it is on Him that the dominant interest of life must be set. And the man who would attain a full religious experience must lay his account with that claim. Life is not properly ordered, nor are its activities gathered round about the one object that should be at the centre of them all, until God and His righteousness, and our relations with God and His righteousness, have become, not merely a part of life, but life's controlling and informing and pervading idea. Life's highest interest is to be spiritual: it is life's spiritual interest that everything entering into life is somehow, directly or indirectly, immediately or remotely, to advance: the human heart is not simply to make room for God among the other things it holds, but first of all to clear all other things out, and then to let them come in again only as God makes room for them. Other activities, not specifically religious, may be engaged in, but only because they fall in with, and



naturally spring from, the God-ward activity which is to engross us. To other things we may turn now and again, but only because the turning to them is a natural thing for the heart turned to God, and because, even while we give ourselves to them, we may still be giving ourselves to God. The passion for God is to overtop all else, and nothing is to have part or lot in us that cannot thrive beneath its shade. To a passing glance from us this or that may have a right: from this pursuit or that there may be no necessity for us to hold aloof; but every other action of ours is only to be, as it were, a parenthesis in the trending of our whole being to God; and when it comes to a question as to what is the one thing on which all we are is bent, the heart's one passion, the soul's one aim, the reply must be, "With my soul have I desired *Thee*." The truly ordered life is the life whose absorbing passion is God.

The place of religion in life—so is the question sometimes formulated for discussion and debate. What is the place of religion in life? Like a good many other loose phrases, this

phrase may sometimes pass unchallenged ; but loose it certainly is. Religion has no place in life : religion *is*, or ought to be, life ; and life *is*, or ought to be, religion. In the right view of it, we are to be and to do nothing except what we pick up—if one may so state it—as our nature takes its way to God. The dominant interest, whereby all things are to be judged, whose sovereignty all other interests must be forced to acknowledge, to whose triumph all life's contents must be brought to contribute, is the spiritual interest of our relation to God. And the entire religious programme through which our previous thought has passed, the entire range of religious facts and forces over which our eye has swept, gather their full meaning and exercise their full power only upon those in whom spiritual passion burns like a consuming fire.

II

But is it said that the dominance of the passion for God is bound to affect injuriously all the practical concerns of life? Does not this path lead straight to an other-worldliness which despises many of the best gifts of God, and makes man stand in this world, not only as a traveller and a pilgrim who can stay but for a while, but as a traveller and a pilgrim in an actually hostile land? Will not all the common and practical side of living go to ruin if the religious interest be granted the supremacy that has here been claimed on its behalf?

It may be admitted that an unhealthy pietism has not seldom mistaken itself for such a spiritual passion as has here been called for; and yet it must be asserted, on the other hand, that a true spiritual passion neither asks for nor permits anything like the detachment from life's practical concerns to which the spurious spiritual passion often leads. For one thing, if the stress of thought be still made to fall upon the conception of

*life* (and at this point, as at all previous points, of our study that is where it is to be laid) the ostentatious asceticism which pietism frequently advocates and affects—the sacrifice of material good as though it must of necessity be itself a moral evil—is ruled out ; for the outward sacrifice may mean no inward gain, and may bring no larger baptism of life. That passion for God which is an earnest desire to share the life and character of God will be governed by no unqualified generalisations concerning material prosperity and material gain, but will determine every case in which the question arises according as the spiritual instinct of the moment may instruct. It is one of the periodically recurring fevers of Christian people and of the Christian Church to denounce, not only the exaltation of material profit to a supremacy it ought not to hold, but the mere partaking of it—to declare that the first duty of all who would be spiritually enlarged is to strip themselves of whatever largeness of earthly possession may be theirs—to make a crime of happiness and ease. In earlier ages, they whom that

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spirit possessed immured themselves in the cloister-cell, there, by severity of discipline, and by persistence in avoiding anything that savoured of joy, to prove themselves prepared for the descent of heavenly grace, and to make room in their emptied lives for the Spirit of God. In later times, men and women fancy that by devoting to philanthropic and religious uses all that legitimate commerce has gained, by refusing to benefit in respect of comfort or enjoyment by that which their own right hand has won, they may best show themselves devoted to the things of Christ and most closely tread in His steps. Yet a spiritual passion which is a passion for *life* could fall under the sway of no such delusion as this. A holy countenance, indeed, this spirit which yearns for hardship as others yearn for delight and ease—a holy countenance, indeed, it wears; but how is it to be ensured that behind the holy look of it (which may mean nothing at all) there is anything of real holy impulse, or that from the outward practice of renunciation aught of inward spirituality will result? As

a matter of fact, the courting of poverty does not necessarily produce spiritual culture ; and he who prostrates himself in the dust as a part of his life's ritual may all the while be opposing his inner nature against God's. There is no necessary relation between an external asceticism and a passion for God ; nor does the spiritual enthusiasm that has been called for involve any condemnation of life's common good.

Further, the supremacy of God-ward passion in the heart does not in any wise disturb or diminish the practical usefulness of life. Would the dominion of this passion mean the disorganising of the world in all its ordinary concerns ? Would it paralyse the brain and hand of the business man, make him the less valuable to the society in which he moves ? Nay, but the dominion of this God-ward passion would secure for everything its due attention and its rightful place : so far from being a disorganising influence, it is the one thing which would set straight all the confusions of the world, add power to every effort that is worthy to be made strong, inspire man to do better every right thing that he



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does so imperfectly now. For the due and successful working of life depends, in the last resort, so much upon having all life's interests ranged in right rank and regulated by right scale, so that there shall be no excess of carefulness here, and no lack of carefulness there. Get the really supreme interest into its place of supremacy, and all other interests will straightway drop into the place that is theirs ! If God be set above all, all else will be where it ought to be, will claim and receive whatever of man's energies it is entitled to share. The passion for God is the one passion whose supremacy would make of life a most practical thing. It gathers up, includes within itself, all that should find a place in human life and thought. Whoso remembers God first will forget nothing that he ought to remember, and will be the truer in all the relations he sustains and in all the tasks he has to do. God, as the one aim for which life is lived, means that every other worthy aim will be but the more forcefully pursued. A true spiritual passion brings order into much that has been chaotic, multiplies the

practical force of the life it dominates, and, so far from disorganising the common concerns of the world, is the one influence strong enough, imperial enough, to fix and keep every human activity to its course—as the imperial sun holds every planet to its appointed way.

### III

It may be brought forward as a further objection to making spiritual passion the supreme thing in life, to an exaltation of the individual's relations with God to the highest place, that it tends to the depreciation of charity, philanthropy, and love, and that the idea of the brotherhood of man is apt to be obscured when the soul holds its special spiritual interests for its all-engrossing care. The answer to the objection, however, is easily found. In any view of religion which looks on *life* (according to the conception of life hitherto adopted) as the central matter, the mutual relations of man with man will

not indeed be held to sum up the entire group of religious concerns, or to bound the entire range of religious exercise—and yet those relations will not be thought unimportant, and will receive all their due, since a purified and rectified *life* will lead to purified and rectified social relations and activities as surely as cause works out its due effect. And the statement thus made needs to be contended for and reiterated in the ears of men, inasmuch as the current substitution of philanthropy and brotherly love for inward religious experience is really a destruction of religion in its true distinctiveness, and puts into the place of the primary essential that which ought to be an automatically produced result. Religion is not philanthropy, but the more religion becomes passionate, so much the more surely will philanthropy emerge.

To speak thus is at any rate to fall back upon the method of Christ Himself. It is, of course, one of the outstanding facts of the matter, that in regard to social problems Christ hardly offered any definite instruction or legislation at all: for Christ there was but

one thing in all the range of human experience that was worth thinking about or influencing—and that was the character and fate of the individual soul. From that He never for an instant averted His gaze: that was the burning centre of all things to which the glow of His attention unceasingly returned; and Christ saw each man in his loneliness rather than all men in company, took every single one to be in himself a world which had to be saved from wreck rather than massed all together into a community which had to be lifted up. Social regeneration was not a thing that Christ set Himself directly to bring about. The Christian Church is to a great extent shifting the emphasis now; and it seems to be fancied by not a few that when you have declared Christianity to mean the brotherhood of man you have probed its inmost secret and touched its deepest heart. Doubtless the Church finds the temptation great thus to resolve religion into little else than a social force, for by so doing an alliance is secured with many other forces, social and political, which with religion as a matter of

individual salvation will have nothing to do. Yet, when one remembers the intense spiritual individualism which ran through the whole of Christ's ministry, there seems something strangely sad—though something which, if it were not so sad, would be laughable—in the spectacle of a professedly Christian Church turning itself into a mere social organisation, or into a political club. It has even been said that the characteristic product of the kingdom, according to Christ, is philanthropists; and surely it would hardly be possible to go further in misinterpretation of the essential message Christ brought; for clear as day is it to the most casual reader of the Gospels, that saints, and not primarily philanthropists, are what Christ came to produce. We are in line with Christ Himself in claiming that, as between a spiritual passion which concentrates upon the individual's relations with his God and a philanthropy which concentrates upon the social well-being of humanity at large, the former is the thing whereon religion lays its chiefest stress.

But, on the other hand, it must be claimed on behalf of the passion for God, that where it exists, it will—automatically, as has been said—set charity, love, all sweet graces of philanthropic activity, into quick and ceaseless play. Once again let it be said that, if the emphasis of religious thought be made to fall upon the idea of *life*, this cannot fail to be; for to share the divine life is necessarily to be possessed of the divine love. If religion takes its all-important function to be the seizing of some benefit which, wrought *for* man, lies waiting *outside* man—the picking up of some jewel which a generous benefactor once flung out of his treasury before he went away—then religious passion might lead to an intensification of selfishness, and to forgetfulness of humanity's claims. But if religion be looked on as a partaking of the life of God through identification with the life in Christ, no such selfishness or forgetfulness can creep in; for—once again—to share the divine life is necessarily to be possessed of, and to give out, the divine love. The regeneration of society is a result that is bound



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to come from the dominance of spiritual passion, even though it be not the first thing on which spiritual passion is set: the saint will be—just because he is a saint—a philanthropist too, since a true sainthood must number love among the graces of character it brings. It is a fact—one has to make the sad admission—that religious people, professedly spiritual men and women, have been, and still are, in some cases eaten through and through by selfishness: there are those who, so that they can but declare heaven to be their own, have no care for the present hell in which so many of their fellows pass their miserable days and years. But that is not because they are too deeply immersed in the passion for God,—it is because they have not really immersed themselves in its flood. And in claiming for a God-ward passion the regulative and supreme place among the elements of life, we do but secure a fuller tenancy among those same elements for a man-ward love; for the nature which sets itself to receive the whole of God will, almost ere it knows it, and as an automatic effect of

the new life it wins, give itself to its brethren in their need. For God is love, and he must dwell in love who dwells in God.

#### IV

The interest of the soul's relations with God, then, is to be the dominant interest of life : religion demands that they who accept it as having any title at all to a place among life's concerns, shall subordinate all other concerns to its supremacy ; it declares that the highest experience is that which is guided to its goal by a veritable passion for God. But the question immediately arises, How can any human heart secure within itself the birth of such a passion as that which is required ? Is it not an impossible thing for any man, however sincere may be his desire, to *make* his whole being thus go out God-ward in love ? And is not this final demand which religion presents a demand before which human hearts can only despair ?

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The consideration which relieves the demand of its seeming hardship, and on which, indeed, the entire religious system is based, is the fact that between God and man there is such an original closeness of relationship, such a community of nature, spite of the spoiling of man's nature which sin has wrought, that in the heart which permits God to approach it and to reveal Himself to it, love for God is inevitably born. And the prescription which religion offers to him who would have a spiritual passion thrill him is this—that he has but to make a silence and a solitude within himself to which God may come, that he has but to make room and time for some practice of meditation, lost art in the modern world that it is, and so, with God and man set face to face, man's God-ward love will wake.

It is true, of course, that any direct manufacture of love is an impossible thing: the very phrase is a contradiction. But though man cannot make himself love God, he can set himself before God in thought and contemplation, seek to understand Him better and to win a clearer revelation of Him, wait for

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Him to make the vision of Himself brighter ; and then, as the realisation of God's glory and His perfectness, of His tenderness and His Fatherhood, with all its possibilities, breaks more and ever more powerfully over the mind of man, man's responsive affection will go out to God, and love for God will be heightened and deepened to the passionate and all-absorbing pitch. This is not mere emotionalism : it is a sober statement of one of the initial facts of the spiritual position ; and man needs to realise that in this primary affinity between himself and God he possesses, as it were, a lever by which he may raise himself to sublimest spiritual altitudes, remote and inaccessible as they may seem to be. We become "God-intoxicated" men when we allow God to come into the quietude of mind and heart and there to show Himself as He is. It is because, amid the pressure of many interests, such a quietude is rarely or never made, that the experience of the birth of love is so little known : it is because man does not permit God to reveal Himself, with all other things for the moment banished from

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the field, that man's heart does not go out to God in warmth of love. For the God who has made us has made us thus—that, faced by the God from whom we came, the desire of our hearts must return to Him; and it is for unclouded sight, for eyes from which the scales have dropped, for a gaze bent straight on God till the wonder of His being burns itself forth in clearness before us, that we need to pray. It may be taken as a certainty that the human heart, knowing God, cannot withhold the devotion which is His due. And in that certainty the human heart may find its hope and its cheer, when religion bids it to be fired with God-ward love; for although at first it may be difficult (so sadly out of practice as are the majority of us) to free ourselves from the tyranny of this obtrusive world, to force ourselves into obliviousness of the materialisms which are ever seeking to thrust themselves upon us, and to pass into the spiritual seeing of the spiritual realities—of the one supreme spiritual reality which is God Himself—yet in this, as in all else, practice tells; and the heart which must

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for a little while drive itself upon the holy quest, set out with something of reluctance to seek for a right God-ward relation and for that union with Christ through which a right God-ward relation is won, will infallibly attain to love's freedom if it does but give God opportunity to exercise the magnetism of what He is. Where He shows Himself to those who are willing and ready to see, He becomes Himself the one aim and the supreme purpose of men.

So, at last, does spiritual experience attain its fulfilment, when spiritual passion, regnant and triumphant over all other things, drives man to love more than fine gold that "response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God" which is conversion, and makes him seek for it as for hid treasure—when it hurries him, in order that he may in very truth be one with God, into such an exercise of faith as identifies him with the life-communicating Christ in whom the life of man and the life of God may meet. And so, at last—in this passionate return of man's nature



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to God's—is the world-process consummated, and the salvation of the individual soul made to fulfil the eternal intention which has been behind all things since before time began. So, at last, does the End return upon the Beginning again, and in the union of man with God is there brought about the “one far-off divine event, To which the whole creation moves.” For in the last resort, the moral process for which religion calls is but the final chapter of that long evolutionary process whose secrets philosophy is set to understand Religion, indeed, tells philosophy the last and greatest secret of all. Viewing the processes of religion thus, taking man's religious experience to be the coming back of God's life-circle to its Source again, surely religion gains in grandeur, and is crowned with greater glory in our eyes! It should mean something to us, and should be not without power to inspire, to believe that when all was without form and void, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep, the developing process which started then was meant to be consummated in the

acts of faith and reverence and love, whereby our spirits seek to fasten themselves to that Spirit whence the first creative impulse came. There is some quickening for our souls in realising that when we submit ourselves to the power of the Christian gospel we are doing our little part to bring about the great end to which God looked forward when He said, Let there be light. And there is more thrilling joy in discipleship to Christ as we remind ourselves that when we run to His arms we are not only making our own safety sure, but satisfying the God who chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. Nor, in thus viewing religious experience as the final and completing chapter of the universal process, do we cause religion to forfeit any of its sweetness, or take the meaning from any of the language of tenderness it has employed hitherto. For still may we sing our anthem in praise of the love which has redeemed and is redeeming us; and, remembering how it is upon a close personal relation that religion centres, and how God has Himself made

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that relation possible when it had been impossible else, may declare with exultation that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.









